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VOL. III

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BOOKS CONSULTED.

1. The Narrative of the Honourable John Byron, Commodore, in a late Expedition Round the World, &c. (Baker and Leigh) 1768
2. Voyage of H.M.S. *Blonde* to the Sandwich Islands in the years 1824—1825, the Right Hon. Lord Byron, Commander (John Murray) 1826
3. Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Right Hon. Lord Byron (H. Colburn) 1822
4. The Life, Writings, Opinions, and Times of G. G. Noel Byron, with courtiers of the present polished and enlightened age, &c., &c., 3 vols. (M. Iley) 1825
5. Narrative of Lord Byron's last Journey to Greece, from Journal of Count Peter Gamba 1825
6. Medwin's Conversations with Lord Byron at Pisa, 2 vols. (H. Colburn) 1825
7. Leigh Hunt's Byron and His Contemporaries (H. Colburn) 1828
8. The Works of Lord Byron, with Life by Thomas Moore, 17 vols. (Murray) 1832
9. Galt's Life of Lord Byron (Colburn and Bentley) . . 1830
10. Kennedy's Conversations on Religion (Murray) . . . 1830
11. Countess of Blessington's Conversations (Colburn) . . 1834
12. Lady Morgan's Memoirs, 2 vols. (W. H. Allen) . . . 1842
13. Recollections of the Countess Guiccioli (Bentley) . . 1869
14. Castelar's Genius and Character of Byron (Tinsley) . . 1870

15. Elze's Life of Lord Byron (Murray) 1872
16. Trelawny's Reminiscences of Byron and Shelley . . 1858
17. Torrens' Memoirs of Viscount Melbourne (Macmillan) . 1878
18. Rev. F. Hodgson's Memoirs, 2 vols. (Macmillan) . 1879
19. Essays and Articles, or Recorded Criticisms, by Macaulay,
Scott, Shelley, Goethe, G. Brandes, Mazzini, Sainte Beuve,
Charles, H. Taine, &c.
20. Burke's Peerage and Baronetage 1879

GENEALOGY OF THE BYRON FAMILY.

THE BYRON FAMILY, FROM THE CONQUEST.

Ralph de Burun (estates in Nottingham and Derby).

Hugh de Burun (Lord of Horseton).

Hugh de Burun (became a monk).

Sir Roger de Burun (gave lands to monks of Swinestead).

Cecilia = Robert de Byron.

Robert de Byron.

Sir John Byron (Governor of York under Edward I.).

Sir Richard Byron.

Sir John (knighted at siege of Calais).

Sir John Butler. Sir John (knighted in 3rd year of Henry V.).

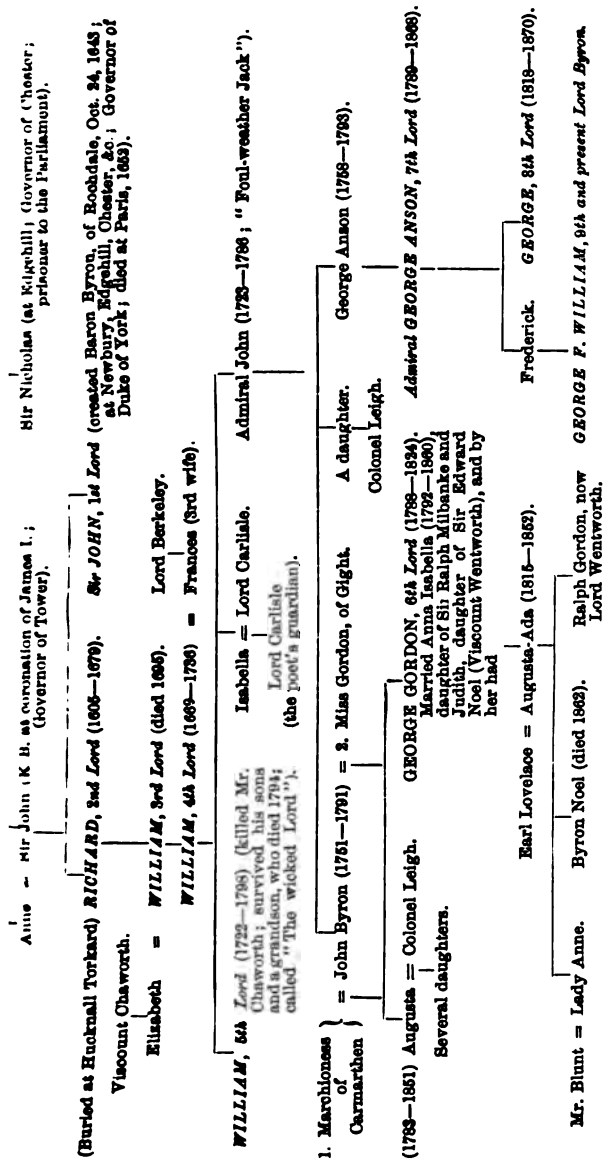
Alice = Sir Nicholas.

Sir John (knighted by Richmond at Milford; fought at Bosworth; died 1489).

2nd wife, widow of George Halgh = Sir John Byron (received grant of Newstead from Henry VIII., May 28, 1540).

Bar
Stalder

Sir Nicholas Strelleye.



There are legends of old Norse Buruns migrating from their home in Scandinavia, and settling, one branch in Normandy, another in Livonia. To the latter belonged a distant Marshal de Burun, famous for the almost absolute power he wielded in the then infant realm of Russia. Two members of the family came over with the Conqueror, and settled in England. Of Erneis de Burun, who had lands in York and Lincoln, we hear little more. Ralph, the poet's ancestor, is mentioned in Doomsday Book—our first authentic record—as having estates in Nottinghamshire and Derby. His son Hugh was lord of Horestan Castle in the latter county, and with his son of the same name, under King Stephen, presented the church of Ossington to the monks of Lenton. The latter Hugh joined their order; but the race was continued by his son Sir Roger, who gave lands to the monastery of Swinstead. This brings us to the reign of Henry II. (1155—1189), when Robert de Byron adopted the spelling of his name afterwards retained, and by his marriage with Cecilia, heir of Sir Richard Clayton, added to the family possessions an estate in Lancashire, where, till the time of Henry VIII., they fixed their seat. The poet, relying on old wood-carvings at Newstead, claims for some of his ancestors a part in the crusades, and mentions a name not apparently belonging to that age—

Near Ascalon's towers, John of Horestan slumbers—

a romance, like many of his, possibly founded on fact, but incapable of verification.

Two grandsons of Sir Robert have a more substantial fame, having served with distinction in the wars of



Edward I. The elder of these was governor of the city of York. Some members of his family fought at Cressy, and one of his sons, Sir John, was knighted by Edward III. at the siege of Calais. Descending through the other, Sir Richard, we come to another Sir John, knighted by Richmond, afterwards Henry VII., on his landing at Milford. He fought, with his kin, on the field of Bosworth, and dying without issue, left the estates to his brother, Sir Nicholas, knighted in 1502, at the marriage of Prince Arthur. The son of Sir Nicholas, known as "little Sir John of the great beard," appears to have been a favourite of Henry VIII., who made him Steward of Manchester and Lieutenant of Sherwood, and on the dissolution of the monasteries presented him with the Priory of Newstead, the rents of which were equivalent to about 4000*l.* of our money. Sir John, who stepped into the Abbey in 1540, married twice, and the premature appearance of a son by the second wife—widow of Sir George Halgh—brought the bar sinister of which so much has been made. No indication of this fact, however, appears in the family arms, and it is doubtful if the poet was aware of a reproach which in any case does not touch his descent. The "*filius naturalis*," John Byron of Clayton, inherited by deed of gift, and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1579. His descendants were prominent as staunch Royalists during the whole period of the Civil Wars. At Edgehill there were seven Byrons on the field.

On Marston, with Rupert 'gainst traitors contending,
Four brothers enrich'd with their blood the bleak field.

Sir Nicholas, one of the seven, is extolled as "a person of great affability and dexterity, as well as martial knowledge,

which gave great life to the designs of the well affected." He was taken prisoner by the Parliament while acting as governor of Chester. Under his nephew, Sir John, Newstead is said to have been besieged and taken; but the knight escaped, in the words of the poet—never a Radical at heart—a "protecting genius,

For nobler combats here reserved his life,
To lead the band where godlike Falkland fell."

Clarendon, indeed, informs us, that on the morning before the battle, Falkland, "very cheerful, as always upon action, put himself into the first rank of the Lord Byron's regiment." This slightly antedates his title. The first battle of Newbury was fought on September, 1643. For his services there, and at a previous royal victory, over Waller in July, Sir John was, on October 24th of the same year, created Baron of Rochdale, and so became the first Peer of the family.

This first lord was succeeded by his brother Richard (1605—1679), famous in the war for his government and gallant defence of Newark. He rests in the vault that now contains the dust of the greatest of his race, in Hucknall Torkard Church, where his epitaph records the fact that the family lost all their present fortunes by their loyalty, adding, "yet it pleased God so to bless the humble endeavours of the said Richard, Lord Byron, that he repurchased part of their ancient inheritance, which he left to his posterity, with a laudable memory for his great piety and charity." His eldest son, William, the third Lord (died 1695), is worth remembering on two accounts. He married Elizabeth, the daughter of Viscount Chaworth, and so wove the first link in a strange association of tragedy and romance: he was a

patron of one of those poets who, approved by neither gods nor columns, are remembered by the accident of an accident, and was himself a poetaster, capable of the couplet,—

My whole ambition only does extend
To gain the name of Shipman's faithful friend,—

an ambition which, considering its moderate scope, may be granted to have attained its desire.

His successor, the fourth lord (1669—1736), gentleman of the bedchamber to Prince George of Denmark, himself living a quiet life, became, by his third wife, Frances, daughter of Lord Berkeley, the progenitor of a strange group of eccentric, adventurous, and passionate spirits. The eldest son, the fifth lord, and immediate predecessor in the peerage of the poet, was born in 1722, entered the naval service, left his ship, the "Victory," just before she was lost on the rocks of Alderney, and subsequently became master of the stag-hounds. In 1765, the year of the passing of the American Stamp Act, an event occurred which coloured the whole of his after-life, and is curiously illustrative of the manners of the time. On January 26th or 29th (accounts vary) ten members of an aristocratic social club sat down to dinner in Pall-mall. Lord Byron and Mr. Chaworth, his neighbour and kinsman, were of the party. In the course of the evening, when the wine was going round, a dispute arose between them about the management of game, so frivolous that one conjectures the quarrel to have been picked to cloak some other cause of offence. Bets were offered, and high words passed, but the company thought the matter had blown over. On going out, however, the disputants met on the stairs, and one of the two, it is uncertain

which, cried out to the waiter to show them an empty room. This was done, and a single tallow candle being placed on the table, the door was shut. A few minutes later a bell was rung, and the hotel master rushing in, Mr. Chaworth was found mortally wounded. There had been a struggle in the dim light, and Byron, having received the first lunge harmlessly in his waistcoat, had shortened his sword and run his adversary through the body, with the boast, not uncharacteristic of his grand nephew, "By G—d, I have as much courage as any man in England." A coroner's inquest was held, and he was committed to the Tower on a charge of murder. The interest in the trial which subsequently took place in Westminster Hall, was so great that tickets of admission were sold for six guineas. The peers, after two days' discussion, unanimously returned a verdict of manslaughter. Byron, pleading his privileges, and paying his fees, was set at liberty; but he appears henceforth as a spectre-haunted man, roaming about under false names, or shut up in the Abbey like a baited savage, shunned by his fellows high and low, and the centre of the wildest stories. That he shot a coachman, and flung the body into the carriage beside his wife, who very sensibly left him; that he tried to drown her; that he had devils to attend him—were among the many weird legends of "the wicked lord." The poet himself says that his ancestor's only companions were the crickets that used to crawl over him, receive stripes with straws when they misbehaved, and on his death made an exodus in procession from the house. When at home he spent his time in pistol-shooting, making sham fights with wooden ships about the rockeries of the lake, and building ugly turrets on the battlements.

He hated his heir presumptive, sold the estate of Rochdale,—a proceeding afterwards challenged—and cut down the trees of Newstead, to spite him ; but he survived his three sons, his brother, and his only grandson, who was killed in Corsica in 1794.

On his own death in 1798, the estates and title passed to George Gordon, then a child of ten, whom he used to talk of, without a shadow of interest, as “the little boy who lives at Aberdeen.” His sister Isabella married Lord Carlisle, and became the mother of the fifth Earl, the poet’s nominal guardian. She was a lady distinguished for eccentricity of manners, and (like her son satirized in the *Bards and Reviewers*) for the perpetration of indifferent verses. The career of the fourth lord’s second son, John, the poet’s grandfather, recalls that of the sea-kings from whom the family claim to have sprung. Born in 1723, he at an early age entered the naval service, and till his death in 1786 was tossed from storm to storm. “He had no rest on sea, nor I on shore,” writes his illustrious descendant. In 1740 a fleet of five ships was sent out under Commodore Anson to annoy the Spaniards, with whom we were then at war, in the South Seas. Byron took service as a midshipman in one of those ships—all more or less unfortunate—called “The Wager.” Being a bad sailor, and heavily laden, she was blown from her company, and wrecked in the Straits of Magellan. The majority of the crew were cast on a bleak rock, which they christened Mount Misery. After encountering all the horrors of mutiny and famine, and being in various ways deserted, five of the survivors, among them Captain Cheap and Mr. Byron, were taken by some Patagonians to the Island of Chiloe, and thence, after some months,

to Valparaiso. They were kept for nearly two years as prisoners at St. Iago, the capital of Chili, and in December, 1744, put on board a French frigate, which reached Brest in October, 1745. Early in 1746 they arrived at Dover in a Dutch vessel.

This voyage is the subject of a well-known apostrophe in *The Pleasures of Hope*, beginning—

And such thy strength-inspiring aid that bore
The hardy Byron from his native shore.
In torrid climes, where Chiloe's tempests sweep
Tumultuous murmurs o'er the troubled deep,
'Twas his to mourn misfortune's rudest shock,
Scourged by the winds and cradled by the rock.

Byron's own account of his adventures, published in 1768, is remarkable for freshness of scenery like that of our first literary traveller, Sir John Mandeville, and a force of description which recalls Defoe. It interests us more especially from the use that has been made of it in that marvellous mosaic of voyages, the shipwreck, in *Don Juan*, the hardships of his hero being, according to the poet—

Comparative
To those related in my grand-dad's narrative.

In June, 1764, Byron sailed with two ships, the "Dolphin" and the "Tamar," on a voyage of discovery arranged by Lord Egmont, to seek a southern continent, in the course of which he took possession of the largest of the Falkland Islands, again passed through the Magellanic Straits, and sailing home by the Pacific, circumnavigated the globe. The planets so conspired that, though his affable manners and considerate treatment made him always

popular with his men, sailors became afraid to serve under "foul-weather Jack." In 1748 he married the daughter of a Cornish squire, John Trevanion. They had two sons and three daughters. One of the latter married her cousin (the fifth lord's eldest son), who died in 1776, leaving as his sole heir the youth who fell in the Mediterranean in 1794.

The eldest son of the veteran, John Byron, father of the poet, was born in 1751, educated at Westminster, and, having received a commission, became a captain in the guards; but his character, fundamentally unprincipled, soon developed itself in such a manner as to alienate him from his family. In 1778, under circumstances of peculiar effrontery, he seduced Amelia D'Arey, the daughter of the Earl of Holderness, in her own right Countess Conyers, then wife of the Marquis of Carmarthen, afterwards Duke of Leeds. "Mad Jack," as he was called, seems to have boasted of his conquest; but the marquis, to whom his wife had hitherto been devoted, refused to believe the rumours that were afloat, till an intercepted letter, containing a remittance of money, for which Byron, in reverse of the usual relations, was always clamouring, brought matters to a crisis. The pair decamped to the continent; and in 1779, after the marquis had obtained a divorce, they were regularly married. Byron seems to have been not only profligate but heartless, and he made life wretched to the woman he was even more than most husbands bound to cherish. She died in 1784, having given birth to two daughters. One died in infancy; the other was Augusta, the half sister and good genius of the poet, whose memory remains like a star on the fringe of a thunder-cloud, only brighter by the passing of the smoke of calumny. In 1807 she

married Colonel Leigh, and had a numerous family, most of whom died young. Her eldest daughter, Georgiana, married Mr. Henry Trevanion. The fourth, Medora, had an unfortunate history, the nucleus of an impertinent and happily ephemeral romance.

The year after the death of his first wife, John Byron, who seems to have had the fascinations of a Barry Lyndon, succeeded in entrapping a second. This was Miss Catherine Gordon of Gight, a lady with considerable estates in Aberdeenshire—which attracted the adventurer—and an overweening Highland pride in her descent from James I., the greatest of the Stuarts, through his daughter Annabella, and the second Earl of Huntly. This union suggested the ballad of an old rhymist, beginning—

O whare are ye gaen, bonny Miss Gordon,
O whare are ye gaen, sae bonny and braw ?
Ye've married, ye've married wi' Johnny Byron,
To squander the lands o' Gight awa'.

The prophecy was soon fulfilled. The property of the Scotch heiress was squandered with impetuous rapidity by the English rake. In 1786 she left Scotland for France, and returned to England toward the close of the following year. On the 22nd of January, 1788, in Holles Street, London, Mrs. Byron gave birth to her only child, George Gordon, sixth Lord. Shortly after, being pressed by his creditors, the father abandoned both, and leaving them with a pittance of 150*l.* a year, fled to Valenciennes, where he died, in August, 1791.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY YEARS AND SCHOOL LIFE.

Soon after the birth of her son, Mrs. Byron took him to Scotland. After spending some time with a relation, she, early in 1790, settled in a small house at Aberdeen. Ere long her husband, who had in the interval dissipated away his remaining means, rejoined her; and they lived together in humble lodgings, until their tempers, alike fiery and irritable, compelled a definite separation. They occupied apartments, for some time, at the opposite ends of the same street, and interchanged visits. Being accustomed to meet the boy and his nurse, the father expressed a wish that the former should be sent to live with him, at least for some days. "To this request," Moore informs us, "Mrs. Byron was at first not very willing to accede; but, on the representation of the nurse that if he kept him over one night he would not do so another, she consented. On inquiring next morning after the child, she was told by Captain Byron that he had had quite enough of his young visitor." After a short stay in the north, the Captain, extorting enough money from his wife to enable him to fly from his creditors, escaped to France. His absence must have been a relief; but his death is said to have so affected the unhappy lady, that her shrieks disturbed the neighbour-

hood. The circumstance recalls an anecdote of a similar outburst—attested by Sir W. Scott, who was present on the occasion—before her marriage. Being present at a representation, in Edinburgh, of the *Fatal Marriage*, when Mrs. Siddons was personating Isabella, Miss Gordon was seized with a fit, and carried out of the theatre, screaming out “O my Biron, my Biron.” All we know of her character shows it to have been not only proud, impulsive, and wayward, but hysterical. She constantly boasted of her descent, and clung to the courtesy title of “honourable,” to which she had no claim. Her affection and anger were alike demonstrative, her temper never for an hour secure. She half worshipped, half hated, the blackguard to whom she was married, and took no steps to protect her property; her son she alternately petted and abused. “Your mother’s a fool!” said a school companion to him years after. “I know it,” was his unique and tragic reply. Never was poet born to so much illustrious, and to so much bad blood. The records of his infancy betray the temper which he preserved through life—passionate, sullen, defiant of authority, but singularly amenable to kindness. On being scolded by his first nurse for having soiled a dress, without uttering a word he tore it from top to seam, as he had seen his mother tear her caps and gowns; but her sister and successor in office, May Gray, acquired and retained a hold over his affections, to which he has borne grateful testimony. To her training is attributed the early and remarkable knowledge of the Scriptures, especially of the Psalms, which he possessed: he was, according to her later testimony, peculiarly inquisitive and puzzling about religion. Of the sense of solitude, induced by his earliest impressions, he characteristically makes a boast. “My

daughter, my wife, my half-sister, my mother, my sister's mother, my natural daughter, and myself, are or were all only children. But the fiercest animals have the fewest numbers in their litters, as lions, tigers, &c."

To this practical orphanhood, and inheritance of feverish passion, there was added another, and to him a heavy and life-long burden. A physical defect in a healthy nature may either pass without notice or be turned to a high purpose. No line of his work reveals the fact that Sir Walter Scott was lame. The infirmity failed to cast even a passing shade over that serene power. Milton's blindness is the occasion of the noblest prose and verse of resignation in the language. But to understand Pope, we must remember that he was a cripple: and Byron never allows us to forget, because he himself never forgot it. Accounts differ as to the extent and origin of his deformity; and the doubts on the matter are not removed by the inconsistent accounts of the indelicate post-mortem examination made by Mr. Trelawny at Mesolonghi. It is certain that one of the poet's feet was, either at birth or at a very early period, so seriously clubbed or twisted as to affect his gait, and to a considerable extent his habits. It also appears that the surgical means—boots, bandages, &c.—adopted to straighten the limb, only aggravated the evil. His sensitiveness on the subject was early awakened by careless or unfeeling references. "What a pretty boy Byron is," said a friend of his nurse. "What a pity he has such a leg." On which the child, with flashing eyes, cutting at her with a baby's whip, cried out, "Dinna speak of it." His mother herself, in her violent fits, when the boy ran round the room laughing at her attempts to catch him, used to say he was a little dog, as bad as his father, and to call him "a lame

brat"—an incident, which, notoriously suggested the opening scene of the *Deformed Transformed*. In the height of his popularity he fancied that the beggars and street-sweepers in London were mocking him. He satirized and discouraged dancing; he preferred riding and swimming to other exercises, because they concealed his weakness; and on his death-bed asked to be blistered in such a way that he might not be called on to expose it. The Countess Guiccioli, Lady Blessington, and others, assure us that in society few would have observed the defect if he had not referred to it; but it was never far from the mind, and therefore never far from the mouth, of the least reticent of men.

In 1792 he was sent to a rudimentary day school of girls and boys, taught by a Mr. Bowers, where he seems to have learnt nothing save to repeat monosyllables by rote. He next passed through the hands of a devout and clever clergyman, named Ross, under whom according to his own account he made astonishing progress, being initiated into the study of Roman history, and taking special delight in the battle of Regillus. Long afterwards, when standing on the heights of Tusculum and looking down on the little round lake, he remembered his young enthusiasm and his old instructor. He next came under the charge of a tutor called Paterson, whom he describes as "a very serious, saturnine, but kind young man. He was the son of my shoemaker, but a good scholar. With him I began Latin, and continued till I went to the grammar school, where I threaded all the classes to the fourth, when I was recalled to England by the demise of my uncle."

Of Byron's early school days there is little further record. We learn from scattered hints that he was backward in

technical scholarship, and low in his class, in which he seems to have had no ambition to stand high; but that he eagerly took to history and romance, especially luxuriating in the *Arabian Nights*. He was an indifferent penman, and always disliked mathematics; but was noted by masters and mates as of quick temper, eager for adventures, prone to sports, always more ready to give a blow than to take one, affectionate, though resentful.

When his cousin was killed at Corsica, in 1794, he became the next heir to the title. In 1797, a friend, meaning to compliment the boy, said, "We shall have the pleasure some day of reading your speeches in the House of Commons," he, with precocious consciousness, replied, "I hope not. If you read any speeches of mine, it will be in the House of Lords." Similarly, when, in the course of the following year, the fierce old man at Newstead died, and the young lord's name was called at school with "Dominus" prefixed to it, his emotion was so great that he was unable to answer, and burst into tears.

Belonging to this period is the somewhat shadowy record of a childish passion for a distant cousin slightly his senior, Mary Duff, with whom he claims to have fallen in love in his ninth year. We have a quaint picture of the pair sitting on the grass together, the girl's younger sister beside them playing with a doll. A German critic gravely remarks, "This strange phenomenon places him beside Dante." Byron himself, dilating on the strength of his attachment, tells us that he used to coax a maid to write letters for him, and that when he was sixteen, on being informed, by his mother, of Mary's marriage, he nearly fell into convulsions. But in the history of the calf-loves of poets it is difficult to distinguish between the imaginative afterthought and the

reality. This equally applies to other recollections of later years. Moore remarks—"that the charm of scenery, which derives its chief power from fancy and association, should be felt at an age when fancy is yet hardly awake and associations are but few, can with difficulty be conceived." But between the ages of eight and ten, an appreciation of external beauty is sufficiently common. No one doubts the accuracy of Wordsworth's account, in the *Prelude* of his early half-sensuous delight in mountain glory. It is impossible to define the influence of Nature, either on nations or individuals, or to say beforehand what selection from his varied surroundings a poet will for artistic purposes elect to make. Shakespeare rests in meadows and glades, and leaves to Milton "Teneriffe and Atlas." Burns, who lived for a considerable part of his life in daily view of the hills of Arran, never alludes to them. But, in this respect like Shelley, Byron was inspired by a passion for the high-places of the earth. Their shadow is on half his verse. "The loftiest peaks most wrapt in clouds and snow" perpetually remind him of one of his constantly recurring refrains,—

He who surpasses or subdues mankind,
Must look down on the hate of those below.

In the course of 1796, after an attack of scarlet fever at Aberdeen he was taken by his mother to Ballater, and on his recovery spent much of his time in rambling about the country. "From this period," he says, "I date my love of mountainous countries. I can never forget the effect, years afterwards, in England, of the only thing I had long seen, even in miniature, of a mountain, in the Malvern Hills. After I returned to Cheltenham I used to watch them every afternoon, at sunset, with a sensation

which I cannot describe." Elsewhere, in *The Island* he returns, amid allusions to the Alps and Apennines, to the friends of his youth :—

The infant rapture still survived the boy,
And Lach-na-gair with Ida look'd o'er Troy,
Mixed Celtic memories with the Phrygian mount,
And Highland linns with Castalie's clear fount.

The poet, owing to his physical defect, was not a great climber, and we are informed, on the authority of his nurse, that he never even scaled the easily attainable summit of the "steep frowning" hill of which he has made such effective use. But the impression of it from a distance was none the less genuine. In the midst of a generous address, in *Don Juan*, to Jeffrey, he again refers to the same associations with the country of his early training :—

But I am half a Scot by birth, and bred
A whole one; and my heart flies to my head
As "Auld Lang Syne" brings Scotland, one and all—
Scotch plaids, Scotch snoods, the blue hills and clear streams,
The Dee, the Don, Balgounie's brig's black wall—
All my boy feelings, all my gentler dreams
Of what I then dreamt, clothed in their own pall,
Like Banquo's offspring . . .

Byron's allusions to Scotland are variable and inconsistent. His satire on her reviewers was sharpened by the show of national as well as personal antipathy; and when, about the time of its production, a young lady remarked that he had a little of the northern manner of speech, he burst out "Good God! I hope not. I would rather the whole d—d country was sunk in the sea. I the Scotch accent!" But, in the passage from which we

have quoted, the swirl of feeling on the other side continues,—

I rail'd at Scots to show my wrath and wit,
Which must be own'd was sensitive and surly.
Yet 'tis in vain such sallies to permit;
They cannot quench young feelings, fresh and early.
I scotch'd, not kill'd, the Scotchman in my blood,
And love the land of mountain and of flood.

This suggests a few words on a question of more than local interest. Byron's most careful biographer has said of him: "Although on his first expedition to Greece he was dressed in the tartan of the Gordon clan, yet the whole bent of his mind, and the character of his poetry, are anything but Scottish. Scottish nationality is tainted with narrow and provincial elements. Byron's poetic character, on the other hand, is universal and cosmopolitan. He had no attachment to localities, and never devoted himself to the study of the history of Scotland and its romantic legends." Somewhat similarly Thomas Campbell remarks of Burns, "he was the most un-Scotsmanlike of Scotchmen, having no caution." Rough national verdicts are apt to be superficial. Mr. Leslie Stephen, in a review of Hawthorne, has commented on the extent to which the nobler qualities and conquering energy of the English character are hidden, not only from foreigners, but from ourselves, by the "detestable lay figure" of John Bull. In like manner, the obtrusive type of the "canny Scot" is apt to make critics forget the hot heart that has marked the early annals of the country, from the Hebrides to the Borders, with so much violence, and at the same time has been the source of so much strong feeling and persistent purpose. Of late years, the struggle for existence, the temptations of a too

ambitious and over active people in the race for wealth, and the benumbing effect of the constant profession of beliefs that have ceased to be sincere, have for the most part stifled the fervid fire in calculating prudence. These qualities have been adequately combined in Scott alone, the one massive and complete literary type of his race. Burns, to his ruin, had only the fire : the same is true of Byron, whose genius, in some respects less genuine, was indefinitely and inevitably wider. His intensely susceptible nature took a dye from every scene, city, and society through which he passed ; but to the last he bore with him the marks of a descendant of the Sea-Kings, and of the mad Gordons in whose domains he had first learned to listen to the sound of the "two mighty voices" that haunted and inspired him through life.

In the autumn of 1798 the family, i.e. his mother—who had sold the whole of her household furniture for 75*l.*—with himself, and a maid, set south. The poet's only recorded impression of the journey is a gleam of Loch Leven, to which he refers in one of his latest letters. He never revisited the land of his childhood. Our next glimpse of him is on his passing the toll-bar of Newstead. Mrs. Byron asked the old woman who kept it, "Who is the next heir?" and on her answer "They say it is a little boy who lives at Aberdeen," "This is he, bless him!" exclaimed the nurse.

Returned to the ancestral Abbey, and finding it half ruined and desolate, they migrated for a time to the neighbouring Nottingham. Here the child's first experience was another course of surgical torture. He was placed under the charge of a quack named Lavender, who rubbed his foot in oil, and screwed it about in wooden machines. This useless treatment is associated

with two characteristic anecdotes. One relates to the endurance which Byron, on every occasion of mere physical trial, was capable of displaying. Mr. Rogers, a private tutor, with whom he was reading passages of Virgil and Cicero, remarked, "It makes me uncomfortable, my lord, to see you sitting there in such pain as I know you must be suffering." "Never mind, Mr. Rogers," said the child, "you shall not see any signs of it in me." The other illustrates his precocious delight in detecting imposture. Having scribbled on a piece of paper several lines of mere gibberish, he brought them to Lavender, and gravely asked what language it was; and on receiving the answer "It is Italian," he broke into an exultant laugh at the expense of his tormentor. Another story survives, of his vindictive spirit giving birth to his first rhymes. A meddling old lady, who used to visit his mother and was possessed of a curious belief in a future transmigration to our satellite—the bleakness of whose scenery she had not realized—having given him some cause of offence, he stormed out to his nurse that he "could not bear the sight of the witch," and vented his wrath in the quatrain.—

In Nottingham county there lives, at Swan Green,
As curst an old lady as ever was seen;
And when she does die, which I hope will be soon,
She firmly believes she will go to the moon.

The poet himself dates his "first dash into poetry" a year later (1800), from his juvenile passion for his cousin Margaret Parker, whose subsequent death from an injury caused by a fall he afterwards deplored in a forgotten elegy. "I do not recollect," he writes through the transfiguring mists of memory, "anything equal to

the *transparent* beauty of my cousin, or to the sweetness of her temper, during the short period of our intimacy. She looked as if she had been made out of a rainbow—all beauty and peace. My passion had the usual effects upon me—I could not sleep ; I could not eat ; I could not rest. It was the texture of my life to think of the time that must elapse before we could meet again. But I was a fool then, and not much wiser now.” *Sic transit secunda.*

The departure at a somewhat earlier date of May Gray for her native country, gave rise to evidence of another kind of affection. On her leaving he presented her with his first watch, and a miniature by Kay of Edinburgh, representing him with a bow and arrow in his hand and a profusion of hair over his shoulders. He continued to correspond with her at intervals. Byron was always beloved by his servants. This nurse afterwards married well, and during her last illness, in 1827, communicated to her attendant, Dr. Ewing of Aberdeen, recollections of the poet, from which his biographers have drawn.

In the summer of 1799 he was sent to London, entrusted to the medical care of Dr. Baillie (brother of Joanna, the dramatist), and placed in a boarding school at Dulwich, under the charge of Dr. Glennie. The physician advised a moderation in athletic sports, which the patient in his hours of liberty was constantly apt to exceed. The teacher—who continued to cherish an affectionate remembrance of his pupil, even when he was told, on a visit to Geneva in 1817, that he ought to have “made a better boy of him”—testifies to the alacrity with which he entered on his tasks, his playful good-humour with his comrades, his reading in history beyond his age, and his intimate acquaintance with the Scriptures. “In my study,” he states, “he found many books open to him ;

among others, a set of our poets from Chaucer to Churchill, which I am almost tempted to say he had more than once perused from beginning to end." One of the books referred to was the *Narrative of the Shipwreck of the "Juno,"* which contains, almost word for word, the account of the "two fathers," in *Don Juan*. Meanwhile Mrs. Byron,—whose reduced income had been opportunely augmented by a grant of a 300*l.* annuity from the Civil List,—after revisiting Newstead followed her son to London, and took up her residence in a house in Sloane-terrace. She was in the habit of having him with her there from Saturday to Monday, kept him from school for weeks, introduced him to idle company, and in other ways was continually hampering his progress.

Byron on his accession to the peerage having become a ward in Chancery, was handed over by the Court to the guardianship of Lord Carlisle, nephew of the admiral, and son of the grand aunt of the poet. Like his mother this Earl aspired to be a poet, and his tragedy, *The Father's Revenge*, received some commendation from Dr. Johnson; but his relations with his illustrious kinsman were from the first unsatisfactory. In answer to Dr. Glennie's appeal, he exerted his authority against the interruptions to his ward's education; but the attempt to mend matters led to such outrageous exhibitions of temper that he said to the master, "I can have nothing more to do with Mrs. Byron; you must now manage her as you can." Finally, after two years of work, which she had done her best to mar, she herself requested his guardian to have her son removed to a public school, and accordingly he went to Harrow, where he remained till the autumn of 1805. The first vacation, in the summer of 1801, is marked by his visit to Cheltenham,

where his mother, from whom he inherited a fair amount of Scotch superstition, consulted a fortune-teller, who said he would be twice married, the second time to a foreigner.

Harrow was then under the management of Dr. Joseph Drury, one of the most estimable of its distinguished head-masters. His account of the first impressions produced by his pupil, and his judicious manner of handling a sensitive nature, cannot with advantage be condensed. "Mr. Hanson," he writes, "Lord Byron's solicitor, consigned him to my care at the age of thirteen and a half, with remarks that his education had been neglected; that he was ill prepared for a public school; but that he thought there was a *cleverness* about him.. After his departure I took my young disciple into my study, and endeavoured to bring him forward by inquiries as to his former amusements, employments, and associates, but with little or no effect, and I soon found that a wild mountain colt had been submitted to my management. But there was mind in his eye. In the first place, it was necessary to attach him to an elder boy; but the information he received gave him no pleasure when he heard of the advances of some much younger than himself. This I discovered, and assured him that he should not be placed till by diligence he might rank with those of his own age. His manner and temper soon convinced me that he might be led by a silken string to a point, rather than a cable: on that principle I acted."

After a time, Dr. Drury tells us that he waited on Lord Carlisle, who wished to give some information about his ward's property and to inquire respecting his abilities, and continues: "On the former circumstance I made no remark; as to the latter I replied, 'He has talents, my

lord, which will add lustre to his rank.' 'Indeed !' said his lordship, with a degree of surprise that, according to my feeling, did not express in it all the satisfaction I expected." With, perhaps, unconscious humour on the part of the writer, we are left in doubt as to whether the indifference proceeded from the jealousy that clings to poetasters, from incredulity, or a feeling that no talent could add lustre to rank.

In 1804 Byron refers to the antipathy his mother had to his guardian. Later he expresses gratitude for some unknown service, in recognition of which the second edition of the *Hours of Idleness* was dedicated "by his obliged ward and affectionate kinsman," to Lord Carlisle. The tribute being coldly received, led to fresh estrangement, and when Byron, on his coming of age, wrote to remind the Earl of the fact, in expectation of being introduced to the House of Peers, he had for answer a mere formal statement of its rules. This rebuff affected him as Addison's praise of Tickell affected Pope, and the following lines, were published in the March of the same year :—

Lords too are bards ! such things at times befall,
And 'tis some praise in peers to write at all.
Yet did or taste or reason sway the times,
Ah ! who would take their titles with their rhymes.
Roscommon ! Sheffield ! with your spirits fled,
No future laurels deck a noble head ;
No muse will cheer, with renovating smile
The paralytic puling of Carlisle.

In prose he adds, "If, before I escaped from my teens, I said anything in favour of his lordship's paper-books, it was in the way of dutiful dedication, and more from the advice of others than my own judgment ; and

I seize the first opportunity of pronouncing my sincere recantation." As was frequently the case with him, he recanted again. In a letter of 1814 he expressed to Rogers his regret for his sarcasms; and in his reference to the death of the Hon. Frederick Howard, in the third canto of *Childe Harold*, he tried to make amends in the lines—

Yet one I would select from that proud throng,
Partly because they blend me with his line,
And partly that I did his sire some wrong.

This is all of any interest we know regarding the fitful connection of the guardian and ward.

Towards Dr. Drury the poet continued through life to cherish sentiments of gratitude, and always spoke of him with veneration. "He was," he says, "the best, the kindest (and yet strict too) friend I ever had; and I look on him still as a father, whose warnings I have remembered but too well, though too late, when I have erred, and whose counsel I have but followed when I have done well or wisely."

Great educational institutions must consult the greatest good of the greatest number of common-place minds, by regulations against which genius is apt to kick; and Byron, who was by nature and lack of discipline peculiarly ill fitted to conform to routine, confesses that till the last year and a half he hated Harrow. He never took kindly to the studies of the place, and was at no time an accurate scholar. In the *Bards and Reviewers*, and elsewhere, he evinces considerable familiarity with the leading authors of antiquity, but it is doubtful whether he was able to read any of the more difficult of them in the original. His translations are generally commonplace, and from the marks on his books he must have often

failed to trust his memory for the meanings of the most ordinary Greek words. To the well-known passage in *Childe Harold* on Soracte and the "Latian echoes" he appends a prose comment, which preserves its interest as bearing on recent educational controversies:—"I wish to express that we become tired of the task before we can comprehend the beauty; that we learn by rote before we get by heart; that the freshness is worn away, and the future pleasure and advantage deadened and destroyed, at an age when we can neither feel nor understand the power of composition, which it requires an acquaintance with life, as well as Latin and Greek, to relish or to reason upon In some parts of the continent young persons are taught from common authors, and do not read the best classics till their maturity."

Comparatively slight stress was then laid on modern languages. Byron learnt to read French with fluency, as he certainly made himself familiar with the great works of the eighteenth century; but he spoke it with so little ease or accuracy that the fact was always a stumbling-block to his meeting Frenchmen abroad. Of German he had a mere smattering. Italian was the only language, besides his own, of which he was ever a master. But the extent and variety of his general reading was remarkable. His list of books, drawn up in 1807, includes more history and biography than most men of education read during a long life; a fair load of philosophy; the poets *en masse*; among orators, Demosthenes, Cicero, and Parliamentary debates from the Revolution to the year 1742; pretty copious divinity, including Blair, Tillotson, Hooker, with the characteristic addition—"all very tiresome. I abhor books of religion, though I reverence and

love my God without the blasphemous notions of sectaries." Lastly, under the head of "Miscellanies" we have *Spectator*, *Rambler*, *World*, &c., &c ; among novels, the works of Cervantes, Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, Mackenzie, Sterne, Rabelais, and Rousseau. He recommends Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* as the best storehouse for second-hand quotations, as Sterne and others have found it, and tells us that the great part of the books named were perused before the age of fifteen. Making allowance for the fact that most of the poet's autobiographic sketches are emphatically "*Dichtung und Wahrheit*," we can believe that he was an omnivorous reader—"I read eating, read in bed, read when no one else reads"—and, having a memory only less retentive than Macaulay's, acquired so much general information as to be suspected of picking it up from Reviews. He himself declares that he never read a Review till he was eighteen years old—when, he himself wrote one, utterly worthless, on Wordsworth.

At Harrow, Byron proved himself capable of violent fits of work, but of "few continuous drudgeries." He would turn out an unusual number of hexameters, and again lapse into as much idleness as the teachers would tolerate. His forte was in declamation: his attitude and delivery, and power of extemporizing, surprised even critical listeners into unguarded praise. "My qualities," he says, "were much more oratorical and martial than poetical; no one had the least notion that I should subside into poesy." Unpopular at first, he began to like school when he had fought his way to be a champion, and from his energy in sports more than from the impression produced by his talents had come to be recognized as a leader among his fellows. Unfortunately, towards the close of his course, in 1805, the headship

of Harrow changed hands. Dr. Drury retired, and was succeeded by Dr. Butler. This event suggested the lines beginning,—

Where are those honours, Ida, once your own,
When Probus fill'd your magisterial throne ?

The appointment was generally unpopular among the boys, whose sympathies were enlisted in favour of Mark Drury, brother of their former master, and Dr. Butler seems for a time to have had considerable difficulty in maintaining discipline. Byron, always "famous for rowing," was a ringleader of the rebellious party, and compared himself to Tyrtæus. On one occasion he tore down the window gratings in a room of the school-house, with the remark that they darkened the hall ; on another he is reported to have refused a dinner invitation from the master, with the impertinent remark that he would never think of asking him in return to dine at Newstead. On the other hand, he seems to have set limits to the mutiny, and prevented some of the boys from setting their desks on fire by pointing to their fathers' names carved on them. Byron afterwards expressed regret for his rudeness ; but Butler remains in his verse as Pomposus "of narrow brain, yet of a narrower soul."

Of the poet's free hours, during the last years of his residence which he refers to as among the happiest of his life, many were spent in solitary musing by an elm-tree, near a tomb to which his name has been given—a spot commanding a far view of London, of Windsor "bosomed high in tufted trees," and of the green fields that stretch between, covered in spring with the white and red snow of apple blossom. The others were devoted to the society of his chosen comrades. Byron, if not one

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of the safest, was one of the warmest of friends ; and he plucked the more eagerly at the choicest fruit of English public school and college life, from the feeling he so pathetically expresses,—

Is there no cause beyond the common claim,
Endear'd to all in childhood's very name ?
Ah, sure some stronger impulse vibrates here,
Which whispers Friendship will be doubly dear
To one who thus for kindred hearts must roam,
And seek abroad the love denied at home.
Those hearts, dear Ida, have I found in thee—
A home, a world, a paradise to me.

Of his Harrow intimates, the most prominent were the Duke of Dorset, the poet's favoured fag ; Lord Clare (the Lycus of the *Childish Recollections*) ; Lord Delawarr (the Euryalus) ; John Wingfield (Alonzo), who died at Coimbra, 1811 ; Cecil Tattersall (Davus) ; Edward Noel Long (Cleon) ; Wildman, afterwards proprietor of Newstead ; and Sir Robert Peel. Of the last, his form-fellow and most famous of his mates, the story is told of his being unmercifully beaten for offering resistance to his fag master, and Byron rushing up to intercede with an offer to take half the blows. Peel was an exact contemporary, having been born in the same year, 1788. It has been remarked that most of the poet's associates were his juniors, and, less fairly, that he liked to regard them as his satellites. But even at Dulwich his ostentation of rank had provoked for him the nickname of "the old English baron." To Wildman, who, as a senior, had a right of inflicting chastisement for offences, he said, "I find you have got Delawarr on your list ; pray don't lick him." "Why not ?" was the reply. "Why, I don't know, except that he is a brother peer." Again, he interfered

with the more effectual arm of physical force to rescue a junior protégé—lame like himself, and otherwise much weaker—from the ill-treatment of some hulking tyrant. “Harness,” he said, “if any one bullies you, tell me, and I’ll thrash him if I can;” and he kept his word. Harness became an accomplished clergyman and minor poet, and has left some pleasing reminiscences of his former patron. The prodigy of the school, George Sinclair, was in the habit of writing the poet’s exercises, and getting his battles fought for him in return. His bosom friend was Lord Clare. To him his confidences were most freely given, and his most affectionate verses addressed. In the characteristic stanzas entitled “L’amitié est l’amour sans ailes,” we feel as if between them the qualifying phrase might have been omitted: for their letters, carefully preserved on either side, are a record of the jealous complaints and the reconciliations of lovers. In 1821 Byron writes, “I never hear the name Clare without a beating of the heart even now; and I write it with the feelings of 1803-4-5, *ad infinitum*.” At the same date he says of an accidental meeting: “It annihilated for a moment all the years between the present time and the days of Harrow. It was a new and inexplicable feeling, like a rising from the grave to me. Clare too was much agitated—more in appearance than I was myself—for I could feel his heart beat to his fingers’ ends, unless, indeed, it was the pulse of my own which made me think so. We were but five minutes together on the public road, but I hardly recollect an hour of my existence that could be weighed against them.” They were “all that brothers should be but the name;” and it is interesting to trace this relationship between the greatest genius of the new time and the son of the statesman

who, in the preceding age, stands out serene and strong amid the swarm of turbulent rioters and ranting orators by whom he was surrounded and reviled.

Before leaving Harrow the poet had passed through the experience of a passion of another kind, with a result that unhappily coloured his life. Accounts differ as to his first meeting with Mary Ann Chaworth, the heiress of the family whose estates adjoined his own, and daughter of the race that had held with his such varied relations. In one of his letters he dates the introduction previous to his trip to Cheltenham, but it seems not to have ripened into intimacy till a later period. Byron, who had, in the autumn of 1802, visited his mother at Bath, joined in a masquerade there and attracted attention by the liveliness of his manners. In the following year Mrs. Byron again settled at Nottingham, and in the course of a second and longer visit to her he frequently passed the night at the Abbey, of which Lord Grey de Ruthyn was then a temporary tenant. This was the occasion of his renewing his acquaintance with the Chaworths, who invited him to their seat at Annesley. He used at first to return every evening to Newstead, giving the excuse that the family pictures would come down and take revenge on him for his grand-uncle's deed, a fancy repeated in the *Siege of Corinth*. Latterly he consented to stay at Annesley, which thus became his headquarters during the remainder of the holidays of 1803. The rest of the six weeks were mainly consumed in an excursion to Matlock and Castleton, in the same companionship. This short period, with the exception of prologue and epilogue, embraced the whole story of his first real love. Byron was on this occasion in earnest; he wished to marry Miss Chaworth, an

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event which, he says, would have "joined broad lands, healed an old feud, and satisfied at least one heart."

The intensity of his passion is suggestively brought before us in an account of his crossing the Styx of the Peak cavern, alone with the lady and the Charon of the boat. In the same passage he informs us that he had never told his love; but that she had discovered—it is obvious that she never returned—it. We have another vivid picture of his irritation when she was waltzing in his presence at Matlock; then an account of their riding together in the country on their return to the family residence; again, of his bending over the piano as she was playing the Welsh air of "Mary Anne;" and lastly, of his overhearing her heartless speech to her maid, which first opened his eyes to the real state of affairs—"Do you think I could care for that lame boy?"—upon which he rushed out of the house, and ran, like a hunted creature, to Newstead. Thence he shortly returned from the rougher school of life to his haunts and tasks at Harrow. A year later the pair again met to take farewell, on the hill of Annesley—an incident he has commemorated in two short stanzas, that have the sound of a wind moaning over a moor. "I suppose," he said, "the next time I see you, you will be Mrs. Chaworth?" "I hope so," she replied (her betrothed, Mr. Musters, had agreed to assume her family name). The announcement of her marriage, which took place in August, 1805, was made to him by his mother, with the remark, "I have some news for you. Take out your handkerchief; you will require it." On hearing what she had to say, with forced calm he turned the conversation to other subjects; but he was long haunted by a loss which he has made the theme of

many of his verses. In 1807 he sent to the lady herself the lines beginning,—

O had my fate been join'd with thine.

In the following year he accepted an invitation to dine at Annesley, and was visibly affected by the sight of the infant daughter of Mrs. Chaworth, to whom he addressed a touching congratulation. Shortly afterwards, when about to leave England for the first time, he finally addressed her in the stanzas,—

'Tis done, and shivering in the gale,
The bark unfurls her snowy sail.

Some years later, having an opportunity of revisiting the family of his successful rival, Mrs. Leigh dissuaded him. "Don't go," she said, "for if you do you will certainly fall in love again, and there will be a scene." The romance of the story culminates in the famous *Dream*, a poem of unequal merit, but containing passages of real pathos, written in the year 1816 at Diodati, as we are told, amid a flood of tears.

Miss Chaworth's attractions, beyond those of personal beauty, seem to have been mainly due—a common occurrence—to the poet's imagination. A young lady, two years his senior, of a lively and volatile temper, she enjoyed the stolen interviews at the gate between the grounds, and laughed at the ardent letters, passed through a confidant, of the still awkward youth whom she regarded as a boy. She had no intuition to divine the presence, or appreciate the worship, of one of the future master-minds of England, nor any ambition to ally herself with the wild race of Newstead, and preferred her hale, commonplace, fox-hunting squire. "She was

the beau ideal," says Byron, in his first accurate prose account of the affair, written 1823, a few days before his departure for Greece, "of all that my youthful fancy could paint of beautiful. And I have taken all my fables about the celestial nature of women from the perfection my imagination created in her. I say created; for I found her, like the rest of the sex, anything but angelic."

Mrs. Musters (her husband re-asserted his right to his own name) had in the long-run reason to regret her choice. The ill-assorted pair after some unhappy years resolved on separation; and falling into bad health and worse spirits, the "bright morning star of Annesley" passed under a cloud of mental darkness. She died, in 1832, of fright caused by a Nottingham riot. On the decease of Musters, in 1850, every relic of her ancient family was sold by auction and scattered to the winds.

CHAPTER III.

CAMBRIDGE, AND FIRST PERIOD OF AUTHORSHIP.

IN October, 1805, on the advice of Dr. Drury, Byron was removed to Trinity College, Cambridge, and kept up a connexion with the University for less than three years of very irregular attendance, during which we hear nothing of his studies, except the contempt for them expressed in some of the least effective passages of his early satires. He came into residence in bad temper and low spirits. His attachment to Harrow characteristically redoubled as the time drew near to leave it, and his rest was broken "for the last quarter, with counting the hours that remained." He was about to start by himself, with the heavy feeling that he was no longer a boy, and yet, against his choice, for he wished to go to Oxford. The *Hours of Idleness*, the product of this period, are fairly named. He was so idle as regards "problems mathematic," and "barbarous Latin," that it is matter of surprise to learn that he was able to take his degree, as he did in March, 1808.

A good German critic, dwelling on the comparatively narrow range of studies to which the energies of Cambridge were then mainly directed, adds somewhat rashly, that English national literature stands for the most part beyond the range of the academic circle.

This statement is often reiterated with persistent inaccuracy; but the most casual reference to biography informs us that at least four-fifths of the leading statesmen, reformers, and philosophers of England, have been nurtured within the walls of her universities, and cherished a portion of their spirit. From them have sprung the intellectual fires that have, at every crisis of our history, kindled the nation into a new life; from the age of Wycliffe, through those of Latimer, Locke, Gibbon, Macaulay, to the present reign of the Physicists, comparatively few of the motors of their age have been wholly "without the academic circle." Analysing with the same view the lives of the British poets of real note from Barbour to Tennyson, we find the proportion of University men increases. "*Poeta nascitur et fit*," and if the demands of technical routine have sometimes tended to stifle, the comparative repose of a seclusion "unravaged" by the fierce activities around it, the habit of dwelling on the old wisdom and harping on the ancient strings, is calculated to foster the poetic temper and enrich its resources. The discouraging effect of a sometimes supercilious and conservative criticism is not an unmixed evil. The verse-writer who can be snuffed out by the cavils of a tutorial drone, is a poetaster silenced for his country's good. It is true, however, that to original minds, bubbling with spontaneity, or arrogant with the consciousness of power, the discipline is hard, and the restraint excessive; and that the men whom their colleges are most proud to remember, have handled them severely. Bacon inveighs against the scholastic trifling of his day; Milton talks of the waste of time on litigious brawling; Locke mocks at the logic of the schools; Cowley complains of being taught words, not

things ; Gibbon rejoices over his escape from the port and prejudice of Magdalen ; Wordsworth contemns the "trade in classic niceties," and roves "in magisterial liberty" by the Cam, as afterwards among the hills.

But all those hostile critics owe much to the object of their animadversion. Any schoolboy can refer the preference of Light to Fruit in the *Novum Organum*, half of *Comus* and *Lycidas*, the stately periods of the *Decline and Fall*, and the severe beauties of *Laodamia*, to the better influences of academic training on the minds of their authors. Similarly, the richest pages of Byron's work—from the date of *The Curse of Minerva* to that of the "Isles of Greece"—are brightened by lights and adorned by allusions due to his training, imperfect as it was, on the slopes of Harrow, and the associations fostered during his truant years by the sluggish stream of his "Injusta noverca." At her, however, he continued to rail as late as the publication of *Beppo*, in the 75th and 76th stanzas of which we find another cause of complaint,—

One hates an author that's all author, fellows
In foolscap uniforms turn'd up with ink —
So very anxious, clever, fine, and jealous,
One don't know what to say to them, or think.

Then, after commending Scott, Rogers, and Moore for being men of the world, he proceeds :—

But for the children of the "mighty mother's,"
The would-be wits and can't-be gentlemen,
I leave them to the daily "Tea is ready,"
Snug coterie, and literary lady.

This attack, which called forth a counter invective of unusual ferocity from some unknown scribbler, is the expression of a sentiment which, sound enough within

limits, Byron pushed to an extreme. He had a rooted dislike of professional *littérateurs*, and was always haunted by a dread that they would claim equality with him on the common ground of authorship. He aspired through life to the superiority of a double distinction, that of a "lord among wits, and among wits a lord." In this same spirit he resented the comparison frequently made between him and Rousseau, and insisted on points of contrast. "He had a bad memory, I a good one. He was of the people; I of the aristocracy." Byron was capable of unbending, where the difference of rank was so great that it could not be ignored. On this principle we may explain his enthusiastic regard for the chorister Eddlestone, from whom he received the cornelian that is the theme of some of his verses, and whose untimely death in 1811 he sincerely mourned.

Of his Harrow friends, Harness and Long in due course followed him to Cambridge, where their common pursuits were renewed. With the latter, who was drowned in 1809, on a passage to Lisbon with his regiment, he spent a considerable portion of his time on the Cam, swimming and diving, in which art they were so expert as to pick up eggs, plates, thimbles, and coins from a depth of fourteen feet—incidents recalled to the poet's mind by reading Milton's invocation to Sabrina. During the same period he distinguished himself at cricket, as in boxing, riding, and shooting. Of his skill as a rider there are various accounts. He was an undoubted marksman, and his habit of carrying about pistols, and use of them wherever he went, was often a source of annoyance and alarm. He professed a theoretical objection to duelling, but was as ready to take a challenge as Scott, and more ready to send one.

Regarding the masters and professors of Cambridge,

Byron has little to say. His own tutor, Tavell, appears pleasantly enough in his verse, and he commends the head of his college, Dr. Lort Mansel, for dignified demeanour in his office, and a past reputation for convivial wit. His attentions to Professor Hailstone at Harrowgate were graciously offered and received; but in a letter to Murray he gives a graphically abusive account of Porson, "hiccuping Greek like a Helot" in his cups. The poet was first introduced at Cambridge to a brilliant circle of contemporaries, whose talents or attainments soon made them more or less conspicuous, and most of whom are interesting on their own account as well as from their connection with the subsequent phases of his career. By common consent Charles Skinner Matthews, son of the member for Herefordshire, 1802-6, was the most remarkable of the group. Distinguished alike for scholarship, physical and mental courage, subtlety of thought, humour of fancy, and fascinations of character, this young man seems to have made an impression on the undergraduates of his own, similar to that left by Charles Austin on those of a later generation. The loss of this friend Byron always regarded as an incalculable calamity. In a note to *Childe Harold* he writes, "I should have ventured on a verse to the memory of Matthews, were he not too much above all praise of mine. His powers of mind shown in the attainment of greater honours against the ablest candidates, than those of any graduate on record at Cambridge, have sufficiently established his fame on the spot where it was acquired; while his softer qualities live in the recollection of friends, who loved him too well to envy his superiority." He was drowned when bathing alone among the reeds of the Cam, in the summer of 1811.

In a letter written from Ravenna in 1820, Byron, in answer to a request for contributions to a proposed memoir, introduces into his notes much autobiographical matter. In reference to a joint visit to Newstead, he writes: "Matthews and myself had travelled down from London together, talking all the way incessantly upon one single topic. When we got to Loughborough, I know not what chasm had made us diverge for a moment to some other subject, at which he was indignant. 'Come,' said he, 'don't let us break through; let us go on as we began, to our journey's end;' and so he continued, and was as entertaining as ever to the very end. He had previously occupied, during my year's absence from Cambridge, my rooms in Trinity, with the furniture; and Jones (his tutor), in his odd way had said, in putting him in, 'Mr. Matthews, I recommend to your attention not to damage any of the movables, for Lord Byron, sir, is a young man of *tumultuous passions*.' Matthews was delighted with this, and whenever anybody came to visit him, begged them to handle the very door with caution, and used to repeat Jones's admonition in his tone and manner. . . . He had the same droll sardonic way about everything. A wild Irishman, named F., one evening beginning to say something at a large supper, Matthews roared 'Silence!' and then pointing to F., cried out, in the words of the oracle, 'Orson is endowed with reason.' When Sir Henry Smith was expelled from Cambridge for a row with a tradesman named 'Hiron,' Matthews solaced himself with shouting under Hiron's windows every evening—

Ah me! what perils do environ
The man who meddles with hot Hiron!



He was also of that band of scoffers who used to rouse Lort Mansel from his slumbers in the lodge of Trinity ; and when he appeared at the window, foaming with wrath, and crying out, " I know you, gentlemen ; I know you ! " were wont to reply, " We beseech thee to hear us, good Lort. Good Lort, deliver us ! "

The whole letter, written in the poet's mature and natural style, gives a vivid picture of the social life and surroundings of his Cambridge days : how much of the set and sententious moralizing of some of his formal biographers might we not have spared, for a report of the conversation on the road from London to Newstead. Of the others gathered round the same centre, Scrope Davies enlisted the largest share of Byron's affections. To him he wrote after the catastrophe :—" Come to me, Scrope ; I am almost desolate—left alone in the world. I had but you, and H., and M., and let me enjoy the survivors while I can." Later he says, " Matthews, Davies, Hobhouse, and myself formed a coterie of our own. Davies has always beaten us all in the war of words, and by colloquial powers at once delighted and kept us in order ; even M. yielded to the dashing vivacity of S. D." The last is everywhere commended for the brilliancy of his wit and repartee : he was never afraid to speak the truth. Once when the poet in one of his fits of petulance exclaimed, intending to produce a terrible impression, " I shall go *mad* ! " Davies calmly and cuttingly observed, " It is much more like silliness than madness ! " He was the only man who ever laid Byron under any serious pecuniary obligation, having lent him 4800*l.* in some time of strait. This was repaid on March 27, 1814, when the pair sat up over champagne and claret from six till midnight, after which " Scrope could not be got into the carriage on the

way home, but remained tipsy and pious on his knees." Davies was much disconcerted at the influence which the sceptical opinions of Matthews threatened to exercise over Byron's mind. The fourth of this quadrangle of amity was John Cam Hobhouse, afterwards Lord Broughton, the steadfast friend of the poet's whole life, the companion of his travels, the witness of his marriage, the executor of his will, the zealous guardian and vindicator of his fame. His ability is abundantly attested by the impression he left on his contemporaries, his published description of the Pilgrimage, and subsequent literary and political career. Byron bears witness to the warmth of his affections, and the charms of his conversation, and to the candour which, as he confessed to Lady Blesington, sometimes tried his patience. There is little doubt that they had some misunderstanding when travelling together, but it was a passing cloud. Eighteen months after his return the poet admits that Hobhouse was his best friend ; and when he unexpectedly walked up the stairs of the Palazzo Lanfranchi, at Pisa, Madame Guiccioli informs us that Byron was seized with such violent emotion, and so extreme an excess of joy, that it seemed to take away his strength, and he was forced to sit down in tears.

On the edge of this inner circle, and in many respects associated with it, was the Rev. Francis Hodgson, a ripe scholar, good translator, a sound critic, a fluent writer of graceful verse, and a large-hearted divine, whose correspondence, recently edited with a connecting narrative by his son, has thrown light on disputed passages of Lord Byron's life. The views entertained by the friends on literary matters were almost identical ; they both fought under the standards of the classic school ; they



resented the same criticisms, they applauded the same successes, and were bound together by the strong tie of mutual admiration. Byron commends Hodgson's verses, and encourages him to write; Hodgson recognizes in the *Bards and Reviewers* and the early cantos of *Childe Harold* the promise of *Manfred* and *Cain*. Among the associates who strove to bring the poet back to the anchorage of fixed belief, and to wean him from the error of his thoughts, Francis Hodgson was the most charitable, and therefore the most judicious. That his cautions and exhortations were never stultified by pedantry or excessive dogmatism, is apparent from the frank and unguarded answers which they called forth. In several, which are preserved, and some for the first time reproduced in the recently-published Memoir, we are struck by the mixture of audacity and superficial dogmatism, sometimes amounting to effrontery, that is apt to characterize the negations of a youthful sceptic. In September, 1811, Byron writes from Newstead:—"I will have nothing to do with your immortality; we are miserable enough in this life, without the absurdity of speculating upon another. Christ came to save men, but a good Pagan will go to heaven, and a bad Nazarene to hell. I am no Platonist, I am nothing at all; but I would sooner be a Paulician, Manichean, Spinozist, Gentile, Pyrrhonian, Zoroastrian, than one of the seventy-two villainous sects who are tearing each other to pieces for the love of the Lord and hatred of each other. I will bring ten Mussulmen, shall shame you all in good will towards men and prayer to God." On a similar outburst in verse, the Rev. F. Hodgson comments with a sweet humanity, "The poor dear soul meant nothing of this." Elsewhere the poet writes, "I have read Watson to Gibbon.

He proves nothing ; so I am where I was, verging towards Spinoza ; and yet it is a gloomy creed ; and I want a better ; but there is something pagan in me that I cannot shake off. *In short, I deny nothing, but doubt everything.*" But his early attitude on matters of religion is best set forth in a letter to Gifford, of 1813, in which he says, "I am no bigot to infidelity, and did not expect that because I doubted the immortality of man I should be charged with denying the existence of a God. It was the comparative insignificance of ourselves and our world, when placed in comparison of the mighty whole of which man is an atom, that first led me to imagine that our pretensions to eternity might be overrated. This, and being early disgusted with a Calvinistic Scotch school, where I was cudgelled to church for the first ten years of my life, afflicted me with this malady ; for, after all, it is, I believe, a disease of the mind, as much as other kinds of hypochondria."

Hodgson was a type of friendly forbearance and loyal attachment, which had for their return a perfect open-heartedness in his correspondent. To no one did the poet more freely abuse himself ; to no one did he indulge in more reckless sallies of humour ; to no one did he more readily betray his little conceits. From him Byron sought and received advice, and he owed to him the prevention of what might have been a most foolish and disastrous encounter. On the other hand, the clergyman was the recipient of one of the poet's many single-hearted acts of munificence—a gift of 1000*l.*, to pay off debts to which he had been left heir. In a letter to his uncle, the former gratefully alludes to this generosity : "Oh, if you knew the exultation of heart, aye, and of head to, I feel at being free from those depressing embarrassments, you would,

as I do, bless my dearest friend and brother, Byron." The whole transaction is a pleasing record of a benefit that was neither sooner nor later resented by the receiver.

Among other associates of the same group should be mentioned Henry Drury—long Hodgson's intimate friend, and ultimately his brother-in-law, to whom many of Byron's first series of letters from abroad are addressed—and Robert Charles Dallas, a name surrounded with various associations, who played a not insignificant part in Byron's history, and, after his death, helped to swell the throng of his annotators. This gentleman, a connexion by marriage, and author of some now forgotten novels, first made acquaintance with the poet in London early in 1808, when we have two letters from Byron, in answer to some compliment on his early volume, in which, though addressing his correspondent merely as 'Sir,' his flippancy and habit of boasting of excessive badness reach an absurd climax.

Meanwhile, during the intervals of his attendance at college, Byron had made other friends. His vacations were divided between London and Southwell, a small town on the road from Mansfield and Newark, once a refuge of Charles I., and still adorned by an old Norman minster. Here Mrs. Byron for several summer seasons took up her abode, and was frequently joined by her son. He was introduced to John Pigot, a medical student of Edinburgh, and his sister Elizabeth, both endowed with talents above the average, and keenly interested in literary pursuits, to whom a number of his letters are addressed; also to the Rev. J. T. Becher, author of a treatise on the state of the poor, to whom he was indebted for encouragement and counsel. The poet often rails at the place, which he found dull in comparison with Cambridge

and London; writing from the latter, in 1807: "O Southwell, how I rejoice to have left thee! and how I curse the heavy hours I dragged along for so many months among the Mohawks who inhabit your kraals!" and adding, that his sole satisfaction during his residence there was having pared off some pounds of flesh. Notwithstanding, in the small but select society of this inland watering-place he passed on the whole a pleasant time—listening to the music of the simple ballads in which he delighted, taking part in the performances of the local theatre, making excursions, and writing verses. This otherwise quiet time was disturbed by exhibitions of violence on the part of Mrs. Byron, which suggest the idea of insanity. After one more outrageous than usual, both mother and son are said to have gone to the neighbouring apothecary, each to request him not to supply the other with poison. On a later occasion, when he had been meeting her bursts of rage with stubborn mockery, she flung a poker at his head, and narrowly missed her aim. Upon this he took flight to London, and his Hydra or Alecto, as he calls her, followed: on their meeting a truce was patched, and they withdrew in opposite directions, she back to Southwell, he to refresh himself on the Sussex coast, till in the August of the same year (1806) he again rejoined her. Shortly afterwards we have from Pigot a description of a trip to Harrogate, when his lordship's favourite Newfoundland, Boatswain, whose relation to his master recalls that of Bounce to Pope, or Maida to Scott, sat on the box.

In November Byron printed for private circulation the first issue of his juvenile poems. Mr. Becher having called his attention to one which he thought objectionable, the impression was destroyed; and the author



set to work upon another, which, at once weeded and amplified, saw the light in January, 1807. He sent copies, under the title of *Juvenilia*, to several of his friends, and among others to Henry Mackenzie (the Man of Feeling), and to Fraser Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee. Encouraged by their favourable notices, he determined to appeal to a wider audience, and in March, 1807, the *Hours of Idleness*, still proceeding from the local press at Newark, were given to the world. In June we find the poet again writing from his college rooms, dwelling with boyish detail on his growth in height and reduction in girth, his late hours and heavy potations, his comrades, and the prospects of his book. From July to September he dates from London, excited by the praises of some now obscure magazine, and planning a journey to the Hebrides. In October he is again settled at Cambridge, and in a letter to Miss Pigot, makes a humorous reference to one of his fantastic freaks: "I have got a new friend, the finest in the world—a *tame bear*. When I brought him here, they asked me what I meant to do with him, and my reply was, 'He should sit for a fellowship.' This answer delighted them not." The greater part of the spring and summer of 1808 was spent at Dorant's Hotel, Albemarle Street. Left to himself, he seems during this period for the first time to have freely indulged in dissipations, which are in most lives more or less carefully concealed. But Byron, with almost unparalleled folly, was perpetually taking the public into his confidence, and all his "sins of blood," with the strange additions of an imaginative effrontery, have been thrust before us in a manner which Rochester or Rousseau might have thought indelicate. Nature and circumstances conspired to the result. With passions which

he is fond of comparing to the fires of Vesuvius and Hecla, he was, on his entrance into a social life which his rank helped to surround with temptations, unconscious of any sufficient motive for resisting them ; he had no one to restrain him from the whim of the moment, or with sufficient authority to give him effective advice. A temperament of general despondency, relieved by reckless outbursts of animal spirits, is the least favourable to habitual self-control. The melancholy of Byron was not of the pensive and innocent kind attributed to Cowley, rather that of the μελαγχολικοί of whom Aristotle asserts, with profound psychological or physiological intuition, that they are δαί ἐν σφοδρῇ ὀρέξει. The absurdity of Moore's frequent declaration, that all great poets are inly wrapt in perpetual gloom, is only to be excused by the modesty which, in the saying so obviously excludes himself from the list. But it is true that anomalous energies are sources of incessant irritation to their possessor, until they have found their proper vent in the free exercise of his highest faculties. Byron had not yet done this, when he was rushing about between London, Brighton, Cambridge, and Newstead—shooting, gambling, swimming, alternately drinking deep and trying to starve himself into elegance, green-room hunting, travelling with disguised companions,¹ patronizing D'Egville the dancing-master, Grimaldi the clown, and taking lessons from Mr. Jackson, the distinguished professor of pugilism, to whom he afterwards affectionately

¹ In reference to one of these, see an interesting letter from Mr. Minto to the *Athenæum* (Sept. 2nd, 1876), in which with considerable though not conclusive ingenuity, he endeavours to identify the girl with "Thyrza" and with "Astarté," whom he regards as the same person.

refers as his "old friend and corporeal pastor and master." There is no inducement to dwell on amours devoid of romance, further than to remember that they never trenched on what the common code of the fashionable world terms dishonour. We may believe the poet's later assertion, backed by want of evidence to the contrary, that he had never been the first means of leading any one astray—a fact perhaps worthy the attention of those moral worshippers of Goethe and Burns who hiss at Lord Byron's name.

Though much of this year of his life was passed unprofitably, from it dates the impulse that provoked him to put forth his powers. The *Edinburgh*, with the attack on the *Hours of Idleness*, appeared in March, 1808. This production, by Lord Brougham, is a specimen of the tomahawk style of criticism prevalent in the early years of the century, in which the main motive of the critic was, not to deal fairly with his author, but to acquire for himself an easy reputation for cleverness, by a series of smart contemptuous sentences. Taken apart, most of the strictures of the *Edinburgh* are sufficiently just, and the passages quoted for censure are all bad. Byron's genius as a poet was not remarkably precocious. The *Hours of Idleness* seldom rise, either in thought or expression, very far above the average level of juvenile verse; many of the pieces in the collection are weak imitations, or commonplace descriptions; others suggested by circumstances of local or temporary interest, had served their turn before coming into print. Their prevailing sentiment is an affectation of misanthropy, conveyed in such lines as these:—

Weary of love, of life, devour'd with spleen,
I rest, a perfect Timon, not nineteen.

This mawkish element unfortunately survives in much of the author's later verse. But even in this volume there are indications of force, and command. The *Prayer of Nature* indeed, though previously written, was not included in the edition before the notice of the critic ; but the sound of *Loch-na-Gair* and some of the stanzas on *Newstead* ought to have saved him from the mistake of his impudent advice. The poet, who through life waited with feverish anxiety for every verdict on his work, is reported after reading the review to have looked like a man about to send a challenge. In the midst of a transparent show of indifference, he confesses to have drunk three bottles of claret on the evening of its appearance. But the wound did not mortify into torpor ; the Sea-Kings' blood stood him in good stead, and he was not long in collecting his strength for the panther-like spring, which, gaining strength by its delay, twelve months later made it impossible for him to be contemned.

The last months of the year he spent at Newstead, vacated by the tenant, who had left the building in the tumble-down condition in which he found it. Byron was, by his own acknowledgment, at this time, "heavily dipped," generosities having combined with selfish extravagances to the result ; he had no funds to subject the place to anything like a thorough repair, but he busied himself in arranging a few of the rooms for his own present and his mother's after use. About this date he writes to her, beginning in his usual style, "Dear Madam," saying he has as yet no rooms ready for her reception, but that on his departure she shall be tenant till his return. During this interval he was studying Pope, and carefully maturing his own Satire. In November the dog Boatswain died in a fit of madness. The event

called forth the famous burst of misanthropic verse, ending with the couplet,—

To mark a friend's remains these stones arise;
I never knew but *one*, and *here* he lies ;—

and the inscription on the monument that still remains in the gardens of Newstead,—

Near this spot
Are deposited the remains of one
Who possessed Beauty without Vanity,
Strength without Insolence,
Courage without Ferocity,
And all the virtues of Man without his Vices.
This Praise, which would be unmeaning Flattery
If inscribed over human ashes,
Is but a just tribute to the Memory of
Boatswain, a Dog,
Who was born at Newfoundland, May, 1808,
And died at Newstead Abbey, November 18, 1808.

On January 22, 1809, his lordship's coming of age was celebrated with festivities, curtailed of their proportions by his limited means. Early in spring he paid a visit to London, bringing the proof of his satire to the publisher, Cawthorne. From St. James's Street he writes to Mrs. Byron, on the death of Lord Falkland, who had been killed in a duel, and expresses a sympathy for his family, left in destitute circumstances, whom he proceeded to relieve with a generosity only equalled by the delicacy of the manner in which it was shown. Referring to his own embarrassment, he proceeds in the expression of a resolve, often repeated, "Come what may, Newstead and I stand or fall together. I have now lived on the spot—I have fixed my heart on it; and no pressure, present or future, shall induce me to barter the last vestige of our inheritance." He

was building false hopes on the result of the suit for the Rochdale property, which, being dragged from court to court, involved him in heavy expenses, with no satisfactory result. He took his seat in the House of Lords on the 13th of March, and Mr. Dallas, who accompanied him to the bar of the House, has left an account of his somewhat unfortunate demeanour.

"His countenance, paler than usual, showed that his mind was agitated, and that he was thinking of the nobleman to whom he had once looked for a hand and countenance in his introduction. There were very few persons in the House. Lord Eldon was going through some ordinary business. When Lord Byron had taken the oaths, the Chancellor quitted his seat, and went towards him with a smile, putting out his hand warmly to welcome him; and, though I did not catch the words, I saw that he paid him some compliment. This was all thrown away upon Lord Byron, who made a stiff bow, and put the tips of his fingers into the Chancellor's hand. The Chancellor did not press a welcome so received, but resumed his seat; while Lord Byron carelessly seated himself for a few minutes on one of the empty benches to the left of the throne, usually occupied by the lords in Opposition. When, on his joining me, I expressed what I had felt, he said 'If I had shaken hands heartily, he would have set me down for one of his party; but I will have nothing to do with them on either side. I have taken my seat, and now I will go abroad.'"

A few days later the *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* appeared before the public. The first anonymous edition was exhausted in a month; a second, to which the author gave his name, quickly followed. He was wont at a later date to disparage this production, and frequently

recanted many of his verdicts in marginal notes. Several, indeed, seem to have been dictated by feelings so transitory, that in the course of the correction of proof blame was turned into praise, and praise into blame ; i.e. he wrote in MS. before he met the agreeable author,—

I leave topography to coxcomb Gell ;

we have his second thought in the first edition, before he saw the Troad,—

I leave topography to classic Gell ;

and his third, half way in censure, in the fifth,—

I leave topography to rapid Gell.

Of such materials are literary judgments made !

The success of Byron's satire was due to the fact of its being the only good thing of its kind since Churchill,—for in the *Baviad* and *Mæviad* only butterflies were broken upon the wheel—and to its being the first promise of a new power. The *Bards and Reviewers* also enlisted sympathy, from its vigorous attack upon the critics who had hitherto assumed the prerogative of attack. Jeffrey and Brougham were seethed in their own milk ; and outsiders, whose credentials were still being examined, as Moore and Campbell, came in for their share of vigorous vituperation. The *Lakers* fared worst of all. It was the beginning of the author's life-long war, only once relaxed, with Southey. Wordsworth—though against this passage is written “unjust,” a concession not much sooner made than withdrawn,—is dubbed an idiot, who—

Both by precept and example shows,
That prose is verse and verse is only prose ;

and Coleridge, a baby,—

To turgid ode and tumid stanza dear.

The lines ridiculing the encounter between Jeffrey and Moore, are a fair specimen of the accuracy with which the author had caught the ring of Pope's antithesis :—

The surly Tolbooth scarcely kept her place.
The Tolbooth felt—for marble sometimes can,
On such occasions, feel as much as man—
The Tolbooth felt defrauded of her charms,
If Jeffrey died, except within her arms.

Meanwhile Byron had again retired to Newstead, where he invited some choice spirits to hold a few weeks of farewell revel. Matthews, one of these, gives an account of the place, and the time they spent there—entering the mansion between a bear and a wolf, amid a salvo of pistol-shots; sitting up to all hours, talking politics, philosophy, poetry; hearing stories of the dead lords, and the ghost of the Black Brother; drinking their wine out of the skull cup which the owner had made out of the cranium of some old monk dug up in the garden; breakfasting at two, then reading, fencing, riding, cricketing, sailing on the lake, and playing with the bear or teasing the wolf. The party broke up without having made themselves responsible for any of the orgies of which Childe Harold raves, and which Dallas in good earnest accepts as veracious, when the poet and his friend Hobhouse started for Falmouth, on their way "*outré mer*."

CHAPTER IV.

TWO YEARS OF TRAVEL.

THERE is no romance of Munchausen or Dumas more marvellous than the adventures attributed to Lord Byron abroad. Attached to his first expedition are a series of narratives, by professing eye-witnesses, of his intrigues, encounters, acts of diablerie and of munificence, in particular of his roaming about the isles of Greece and taking possession of one of them, which have all the same relation to reality as the *Arabian Nights* to the actual reign of Haroun Al Raschid.¹

Byron had far more than an average share of the *émigré* spirit, the counterpoise in the English race of their otherwise arrogant isolation. He held with Wilhelm Meister—

To give space for wandering is it,
That the earth was made so wide.

and wrote to his mother from Athens: "I am so convinced of the advantages of looking at mankind, instead of reading about them, and the bitter effects of staying at home with all the narrow prejudices of an islander, that I think

¹ Those who wish to read them are referred to the three large volumes—published in 1825, by Mr. Iley, Portman Street—of anonymous authorship.

there should be a law amongst us to send our young men abroad for a term, among the few allies our wars have left us."

On June 11th, having borrowed money at heavy interest, and stored his mind with information about Persia and India, the contemplated but unattained goal of his travels, he left London, accompanied by his friend Hobhouse, Fletcher his valet, Joe Murray his old butler, and Robert Rushton the son of one of his tenants, supposed to be represented by the Page in *Childe Harold*. The two latter, the one on account of his age, the other from his health breaking down, he sent back to England from Gibraltar.

Becalmed for some days at Falmouth, a town which he describes as "full of Quakers and salt fish," he despatched letters to his mother, Drury, and Hodgson, exhibiting the changing moods of his mind. Smarting under a slight he had received at parting from a school-companion, who had excused himself from a farewell meeting on the plea that he had to go shopping, he at one moment talks of his desolation, and says that, "leaving England without regret," he has thought of entering the Turkish service; in the next, especially in the stanzas to Hodgson, he runs off into a strain of boisterous buffoonery. On the 2nd of July, the packet, by which he was bound, sailed for Lisbon and arrived there about the middle of the month, when the English fleet was anchored in the Tagus. The poet in some of his stanzas has described the fine view of the port and the disconsolate dirtiness of the city itself, the streets of which were at that time rendered dangerous by the frequency of religious and political assassinations. Nothing else remains of his sojourn to interest us, save the statement of Mr. Hob-

house, that his friend made a more perilous, though less celebrated, achievement by water than his crossing the Hellespont, in swimming from old Lisbon to Belem Castle. Byron praises the neighbouring Cintra, as "the most beautiful village in the world," though he joins with Wordsworth in heaping anathemas on the Convention, and extols the grandeur of Mafra, the Escorial of Portugal, in the convent of which a monk, showing the traveller a large library, asked if the English had any books in their country. Despatching his baggage and servants by sea to Gibraltar, he and his friend started on horseback through the south-west of Spain. Their first resting-place, after a ride of 400 miles, performed at an average rate of seventy in the twenty-four hours, was Seville, where they lodged for three days in the house of two ladies, to whose attractions, as well as the fascination he seems to have exerted over them, the poet somewhat garrulously refers. Here, too, he saw, parading on the Prado, the famous *Maid of Saragossa*, whom he celebrates in his equally famous stanzas (*Childe Harold*, I., 54—58). Of Cadiz, the next stage, he writes with enthusiasm as a modern Cythera, describing the bull fights in his verse, and the beauties in glowing prose. The belles of this city, he says, are the Lancashire witches of Spain; and by reason of them, rather than the sea-shore or the Sierra Morena, "sweet Cadiz is the first spot in the creation." Hence, by an English frigate, they sailed to Gibraltar, for which place he has nothing but curses. Byron had no sympathy with the ordinary forms of British patriotism, and in our great struggle with the tyranny of the First Empire, he may almost be said to have sympathized with Napoleon.

The ship stopped at Cagliari in Sardinia, and again at

Girgenti on the Sicilian coast. Arriving at Malta, they halted there for three weeks—time enough to establish a sentimental, though Platonic, flirtation with Mrs. Spencer Smith, wife of our minister at Constantinople, sister-in-law of the famous admiral, and the heroine of some exciting adventures. She is the “Florence” of *Childe Harold*, and is afterwards addressed in some of the most graceful verses of his cavalier minstrelsy—

Do thou, amidst the fair white walls,
If Cadiz yet be free,
At times from out her latticed halls
Look o’er the dark blue sea—
Then think upon Calypso’s isles,
Endear’d by days gone by,—
To others give a thousand smiles,
To me a single sigh.

The only other adventure of the visit is Byron’s quarrel with an officer, on some unrecorded ground, which Hobhouse tells us nearly resulted in a duel. The friends left Malta on September 29th, in the war-ship “Spider,” and after anchoring off Patras, and spending a few hours on shore, they skirted the coast of Acarnania, in view of localities—as Ithaca, the Leucadian rock, and Actium—whose classic memories filtered through the poet’s mind and found a place in his masterpieces. Landing at Previsa, they started on a tour through Albania,—

O’er many a mount sublime,
Through lands scarce noticed in historic tales.

Byron was deeply impressed by the beauty of the scenery, and the half-savage independence of the people, described as “always strutting about with slow dignity,

though in rags." In October we find him with his companions at Janina, hospitably entertained by order of Ali Pasha, the famous Albanian Turk, bandit, and despot, then besieging Ibrahim at Berat in Illyria. They proceeded on their way by "bleak Pindus," Acherusia's lake, and Zitza, with its monastery door battered by robbers. Before reaching the latter place, they encountered a terrific thunderstorm, in the midst of which they separated, and Byron's detachment lost its way for nine hours, during which he composed the verses to Florence, quoted above.

Some days later they together arrived at Tepaleni, and were there received by Ali Pasha in person. The scene on entering the town is described as recalling Scott's Branksome Castle and the feudal system; and the introduction to Ali, who sat for some of the traits of the poet's corsairs, —is graphically reproduced in a letter to Mrs. Byron. "His first question was, why at so early an age I left my country, and without a 'lala,' or nurse? He then said the English minister had told him I was of a great family, and desired his respects to my mother, which I now present to you (date, November 12th). He said he was certain I was a man of birth, because I had small ears, curling hair, and little white hands. He told me to consider him as a father whilst I was in Turkey, and said he looked on me as his son. Indeed he treated me like a child, sending me almonds, fruit, and sweetmeats, twenty times a day." Byron shortly afterwards discovered his host to be a poisoner and an assassin. "Two days ago," he proceeds in a passage which illustrates his character and a common experience, "I was nearly lost in a Turkish ship-of-war, owing to the ignorance of the captain and crew. Fletcher yelled after his wife; the Greeks called on all the saints,

the Mussulmen on Alla ; the captain burst into tears and ran below deck, telling us to call on God. The sails were split, the mainyard shivered, the wind blowing fresh, the night setting in ; and all our chance was to make for Corfu — or, as F. pathetically called it, ‘a watery grave.’ I did what I could to console him, but finding him incorrigible, wrapped myself in my Albanian capote, and lay down on the deck to wait the worst.” Unable from his lameness, says Hobhouse, to be of any assistance, he in a short time was found amid the trembling sailors, fast asleep. They got back to the coast of Suli, and shortly afterwards started through Acarnania and Ætolia for the Morea, again rejoicing in the wild scenery and the apparently kindred spirits of the wild men among whom they passed. Byron was especially fascinated by the fire-light dance and song of the robber band, which he describes and reproduces in *Childe Harold*. On the 21st of November he reached Mesolonghi, where, fifteen years later, he died. Here he dismissed most of his escort, proceeded to Patras, and on to Vostizza, caught sight of Parnassus, and accepted a flight of eagles near Delphi as a favouring sign of Apollo. “The last bird,” he writes, “I ever fired at was an eaglet on the shore of the Gulf of Lepanto. It was only wounded and I tried to save it—the eye was so bright. But it pined and died in a few days : and I never did since, and never will, attempt the life of another bird.” From Livadia the travellers proceeded to Thebes, visited the cave of Trophonius, Diana’s fountain, the so-called ruins of Pindar’s house, and the field of Cheronea, crossed Cithæron, and on Christmas, 1809, arrived before the defile, near the ruins of Phyle, where, he had his first glimpse of Athens, which evoked the famous lines :—

Ancient of days, august Athena! where,
Where are thy men of might? thy grand in soul?
Gone, glimmering through the dream of things that were.
First in the race that led to glory's goal,
They won, and pass'd away: is this the whole—
A schoolboy's tale, the wonder of an hour?

After which he reverts to his perpetually recurring moral,
“Men come and go; but the hills, and waves, and skies,
and stars, endure”—

Apollo still thy long, long summer gilds;
Still in his beam Mendeli's marbles glare;
Art, glory, freedom fail—but nature still is fair.

The duration of Lord Byron's first visit to Athens was about three months, and it was varied by excursions to different parts of Attica; Eleusis, Hymettus, Cape Colonna, (Sunium, the scene of Falconer's shipwreck), the Colonus of Œdipus, and Marathon, the plain of which is said to have been placed at his disposal for about the same sum that, thirty years later, an American offered to give for the bark with the poet's name on the tree at Newstead. Byron had a poor opinion of the modern Athenians, who seem to have at this period done their best to justify the Roman satirist. He found them superficial, cunning, and false; but, with generous historic insight, he says that no nation in like circumstances would have been much better; that they had the vices of ages of slavery, from which it would require ages of freedom to emancipate them.

In the Greek capital he lodged at the house of a respectable lady, widow of an English vice-consul, who had three daughters, the eldest of whom, Theresa, acquired an innocent and enviable fame as the Maid of Athens, without the dangerous glory of having taken any very

firm hold of the heart that she was asked to return. A more solid passion was the poet's genuine indignation on the "lifting," in Border phrase, of the marbles from the Parthenon, and their being taken to England by order of Lord Elgin. Byron never wrote anything more sincere than the *Curse of Minerva*; and he has recorded few incidents more pathetic than that of the old Greek who, when the last stone was removed for exportation, shed tears, and said "τέλος!" The question is still an open one of ethics. There are few Englishmen of the higher rank who do not hold London in the right hand as barely balanced by the rest of the world in the left; a judgment in which we can hardly expect Romans, Parisians, and Athenians to concur. On the other hand, the marbles were mouldering at Athens, and they are preserved, like ginger, in the British Museum.

Among the adventures of this period are an expedition across the Ilissus to some caves near Kharyati, in which the travellers were by accident nearly entombed; another to Pentelicus, where they tried to carve their names on the marble rock; and a third to the environs of the Piræus in the evening light. Early in March the convenient departure of an English sloop-of-war induced them to make an excursion to Smyrna. There, on the 28th of March, the second canto of *Childe Harold*, begun in the previous autumn at Janina, was completed. They remained in the neighbourhood, visiting Ephesus, without poetical result further than a reference to the jackals, in the *Siege of Corinth*; and on April 11th left by the "Salsette," a frigate on its way to Constantinople. The vessel touched at the Troad, and Byron spent some time on land, snipe-shooting, and rambling among the reputed ruins of Ilium. The poet characteristically, in *Don Juan*

and elsewhere, attacks the sceptics, and then half ridicules the belief.

I've stood upon Achilles' tomb,
And heard Troy doubted! Time will doubt of Rome:

* * * * *

There, on the green and village-cotted hill, is,
Flank'd by the Hellespont, and by the sea,
Entomb'd the bravest of the brave Achilles.—
They say so: Bryant says the contrary.

Being again detained in the Dardanelles, waiting for a fair wind, Byron landed on the European side, and swam, in company with Lieutenant Ekenhead, from Sestos to Abydos—a performance of which he boasts some twenty times. The strength of the current is the main difficulty of a feat, since so surpassed as to have passed from notice; but it was a tempting theme for classical allusions. At length, on May 14, he reached Constantinople, exalted the Golden Horn above all the sights he had seen, and now first abandoned his design of travelling to Persia. Galt, and other more or less gossiping travellers, have accumulated a number of incidents of the poet's life at this period, of his fanciful dress, blazing in scarlet and gold, and of his sometimes absurd contentions for the privileges of rank—as when he demanded precedence of the English ambassador in an interview with the Sultan, and, on its refusal, could only be pacified by the assurances of the Austrian internuncio. In converse with indifferent persons he displayed a curious alternation of frankness and hauteur, and indulged a habit of letting people up and down, by which he frequently gave offence. More interesting are narratives of the suggestion of some of his verses, as the slave-market in *Don Juan*, and the spectacle of the dead criminal tossed on the waves, revived

in the *Bride of Abydos*. One example is, if we except Dante's *Ugolino*, the most remarkable instance in literature of the expansion, without the weakening, of the horrible. Take first Mr. Hobhouse's plain prose: "The sensations produced by the state of the weather"—it was wretched and stormy when they left the "Salsette" for the city—"and leaving a comfortable cabin, were in unison with the impressions which we felt when, passing under the palace of the Sultans, and gazing at the gloomy cypress which rises above the walls, we saw two dogs gnawing a dead body." After this we may measure the almost fiendish force of a morbid imagination brooding over the incident,—

And he saw the lean dogs beneath the wall
Hold o'er the dead their carnival :
Gorging and growling o'er carcass and limb,
They were too busy to bark at him.
From a Tartar's skull they had stripp'd the flesh,
As ye peel the fig when its fruit is fresh ;
And their white tusks crunch'd on the whiter skull,
As it slipp'd through their jaws when their edge grew dull.

No one ever more persistently converted the incidents of travel into poetic material ; but sometimes in doing so he borrowed more largely from his imagination than his memory, as in the description of the seraglio, of which there is reason to doubt his having seen more than the entrance.

Byron and Hobhouse set sail from Constantinople on the 14th July, 1810—the latter to return direct to England, a determination which, from no apparent fault on either side, the former did not regret. One incident of the passage derives interest from its possible consequence. Taking up, and unsheathing, a yataghan which he found

on the quarter-deck, he remarked, 'I should like to know how a person feels after committing a murder.' This harmless piece of melodrama—the idea of which is expanded in Mr. Dobell's *Balder*, and parodied in *Firmilian*—may have been the basis of a report afterwards circulated, and accepted among others by Goethe, that his lordship had committed a murder; hence, obviously, the character of *Lara*, and the mystery of *Manfred*! The poet parted from his friend at Zea (Ceos): after spending some time in solitude on the little island, he returned to Athens, and there renewed acquaintance with his school friend, the Marquis of Sligo, who after a few days accompanied him to Corinth. They then separated, and Byron went on to Patras in the Morea, where he had business with the Consul. He dates from there at the close of July. It is impossible to give a consecutive account of his life during the next ten months, a period consequently filled up with the contradictory and absurd mass of legends before referred to. A few facts only of any interest are extricable. During at least half of the time his head-quarters were at Athens, where he again met his friend the Marquis, associated with the English Consul and Lady Hester Stanhope, studied Romaic in a Franciscan monastery—where he saw and conversed with a motley crew of French, Italians, Danes, Greeks, Turks, and Americans,—wrote to his mother and others, saying he had swum from Sestos to Abydos, was sick of Fletcher bawling for beef and beer, had done with authorship, and hoped on his return to lead a quiet recluse life. He nevertheless made notes to *Harold*, composed the *Hints from Horace* and the *Curse of Minerva*, and presumably brooded over, and outlined in his mind, many of his verse romances. We

hear no more of the *Maid of Athens*, but there is no fair ground to doubt that the *Giaour* was suggested by his rescue of a young woman whom, for the fault of an amour with some Frank, a party of Janissaries were about to throw, sewn up in a sack, into the sea. Mr. Galt gives no authority for his statement, that the girl's deliverer was the original cause of her sentence. We may rest assured that if it had been so, Byron himself would have told us of it.

A note to the *Siege of Corinth* is suggestive of his unequalled restlessness. "I visited all three—Tripolitza, Napoli, and Argos—in 1810-11; and in the course of journeying through the country, from my first arrival in 1809, crossed the Isthmus eight times on my way from Attica to the Morea. In the latter locality we find him during the autumn the honoured guest of the Vizier Valhi (a son of Ali Pasha), who presented him with a fine horse. During a second visit to Patras, in September, he was attacked by the same sort of marsh fever from which, fourteen years afterwards, in the near neighbourhood, he died. On his recovery, in October, he complains of having been nearly killed by the heroic measures of the native doctors: "One of them trusts to his genius, never having studied; the other, to a campaign of eighteen months *against* the sick of Otranto, which he made in his youth with great effect. When I was seized with my disorder, I protested against both these assassins, but in vain." He was saved by the zeal of his servants, who asseverated that if his lordship died they would take good care the doctors should also; on which the learned men discontinued their visits, and the patient revived. On his final return to Athens, the restoration of his health was retarded by one of his long courses of reducing diet; he lived mainly on

rice, and vinegar and water. From that city he writes in the early spring, intimating his intention of proceeding to Egypt; but Mr. Hanson, his man of business, ceasing to send him remittances, the scheme was abandoned. Beset by letters about his debts, he again declares his determination to hold fast by Newstead, adding that if the place which is his only tie to England is sold, he won't come back at all. Life on the shores of the Archipelago is far cheaper and happier, and "*Ubi bene ibi patria*," for such a citizen of the world as he has become. Later he went to Malta, and was detained there by another bad attack of tertian fever. The next record of consequence is from the "*Volage*" frigate, at sea, June 29, 1811, when he writes in a despondent strain to Hodgson, that he is returning home "without a hope, and almost without a desire," to wrangle with creditors and lawyers about executions and coal pits. "In short, I am sick and sorry; and when I have a little repaired my irreparable affairs, away I shall march, either to campaign in Spain, or back again to the East, where I can at least have cloudless skies and a cessation from impertinence. I am sick of fops, and poesy, and prate, and shall leave the whole Castalian state to Bufo, or anybody else. Howbeit, I have written some 4000 lines, of one kind or another, on my travels." With these, and a collection of marbles, and skulls, and hemlock, and tortoises, and servants, he reached London about the middle of July, and remained there, making some arrangements about business and publication. On the 23rd we have a short but kind letter to his mother, promising to pay her a visit on his way to Rochdale. "You know you are a vixen, but keep some champagne for me," he had written from abroad. On receipt of the letter she remarked, "If I should be dead before he comes down, what a strange

thing it would be." Towards the close of the month she had an attack so alarming that he was summoned ; but before he had time to arrive she had expired, on the 1st of August, in a fit of rage brought on by reading an upholsterer's bill. On the way Byron heard the intelligence, and wrote to Dr. Pigot : " I now feel the truth of Gray's observation, that we can only have *one* mother. Peace be with her ! " On arriving at Newstead, all their storms forgotten, the son was so affected that he did not trust himself to go to the funeral, but stood dreamily gazing at the cortège from the gate of the Abbey. Five days later, Charles S. Matthews was drowned.

CHAPTER V.

SECOND PERIOD OF AUTHORSHIP—LIFE IN LONDON— CORRESPONDENCE WITH SCOTT.

THE deaths of Long, Wingfield, Eddlestone, Matthews, and of his mother, had narrowed the circle of the poet's early companions; and, though he talks of each loss in succession as if it had been that of an only friend, we can credit a degree of loneliness, and excuse a certain amount of bitterness in the feelings with which he returned to London. He had at this time seen very little of the only relative whom he ever deeply loved. He and his half-sister met casually in 1804, and again in the following year. After her marriage (1807), Byron writes from abroad (1810), regretting having distressed her by his quarrel with Lord Carlisle. In 1811 she is mentioned as reversionary heiress of his estate. Towards the close of 1813, there are two allusions which testify to their mutual affection. Next we come to the interesting series of letters of 1815-16, published with the Memoir of Mr. Hodgson, to whom, along with Hobhouse and Scrope Davies, his lordship in a will and codicil leaves the management of his property. Harness appears frequently at this period among his surviving intimates: to this list there was shortly added another. In speaking of his *Bards and Reviewers*, the author makes occa-

sional reference to the possibility of his being called to account for some of his attacks. His expectation was realized by a letter from the poet Moore, dated Dublin, Jan. 1, 1810, couched in peremptory terms, demanding to know if his lordship avowed the authorship of the insults contained in the poem. This letter, being entrusted to Mr. Hodgson, was not forwarded to Byron abroad ; but shortly after his return, he received another in more conciliatory terms, renewing the complaint. To this he replied in a stiff but manly letter, that he had never meant to insult Mr. Moore ; but that he was, if necessary, ready to give him satisfaction. Moore accepting the explanation, somewhat querulously complained of his advances to friendship not being received. Byron again replied that much as he would feel honoured by Mr. Moore's acquaintance, he being practically threatened by the irate Irishman could hardly make the first advances. This called forth a sort of apology ; the correspondents met at the house of Mr. Rogers, and out of the somewhat awkward circumstances, owing to the frankness of the " noble author," as the other ever after delights to call him, arose the life-long intimacy which had such various and lasting results. Moore has been called a false friend to Byron, and a traitor to his memory. The judgment is somewhat harsh, but the association between them was unfortunate. Thomas Moore had some sterling qualities. His best satirical pieces are inspired by a real indignation, and lit up by a genuine humour. He was also an exquisite musician in words, and must have been occasionally a fascinating companion. But he was essentially a worldling, and, as such, a superficial critic. He encouraged the shallow affectations of his great friend's weaker work, and recoiled in alarm before the daring

defiance of his stronger. His criticisms on all Byron wrote and felt seriously on religion are almost worthy of a conventicle. His letters to others on *Manfred*, and *Cain*, and *Don Juan*, are the expression of sentiments which he had never the courage to state explicitly to the author. On the other hand, Byron was attracted beyond reasonable measure by his gracefully deferential manners, paid too much regard to his opinions, and overestimated his genius. For the subsequent destruction of the memoirs, urged by Mr. Hobhouse and Mrs. Leigh, he was not wholly responsible; though a braver man, having accepted the position of his lordship's literary legatee, with the express understanding that he would see to the fulfilment of the wishes of his dead friend, would have to the utmost resisted their total frustration.

Meanwhile, on landing in England, the poet had placed in the hands of Mr. Dallas the *Hints from Horace*, which he intended to have brought out by the publisher Cawthorne. Of this performance—an inferior edition, relieved by a few strong touches, of the *Bards and Reviewers*—Dallas ventured to express his disapproval. "Have you no other result of your travels?" he asked; and got for answer, "A few short pieces; and a lot of Spenserian stanzas; not worth troubling you with, but you are welcome to them." Dallas took the remark literally, saw they were a safe success, and assumed to himself the merit of the discovery, the risks, and the profits. It is the converse of the story of Gabriel Harvey and the *Faery Queene*. The first two cantos of *Childe Harold* bear no comparison with the legend of *Una and the Red Cross Knight*; but there was no mistake about their proof of power, their novelty, and adaptation to a public taste as yet unjaded by elo-

quent and imaginative descriptions of foreign scenery, manners, and climates.

The poem—after being submitted to Gifford, in defiance of the protestations of the author, who feared that the reference might seem to seek the favour of the august *Quarterly*—was accepted by Mr. Murray, and proceeded through the press, subject to change and additions, during the next five months. The *Hints from Horace*, fortunately postponed and then suspended, appeared posthumously in 1831. Byron remained at Newstead till the close of October, negotiating with creditors and lawyers, and engaged in a correspondence about his publications, in the course of which he deprecates any identification of himself and his hero, though he had at first called him Childe Byron. “Instruct Mr. Murray,” he entreats, “not to call the work ‘Child of Harrow’s Pilgrimage,’ as he has done to some of my astonished friends, who wrote to inquire after my *sanity*, as well they might.” At the end of the month we find him in London, again indulging in a voyage in “the ship of fools,” in which Moore claims to have accompanied him; but at the same time exhibiting remarkable shrewdness in reference to the affairs of his household. In February, 1812, he again declares to Hodgson his resolve to leave England for ever, and fix himself in “one of the fairest islands of the East.” On the 27th he made in the House of Lords his speech on a Bill to introduce special penalties against the frame-breakers of Nottingham. This effort, on which he received many compliments, led among other results to a friendly correspondence with Lord Holland. On April 21st of the same year, he again addressed the House on behalf of Roman Catholic Emancipation; and in June, 1813, in favour of Major Cartwright’s petition.

On all these occasions, as afterwards on the continent, Byron espoused the Liberal side of politics. But his rôle was that of Manlius or Cæsar, and he never fails to remind us that he himself was *for* the people, not *of* them. His latter speeches, owing partly to his delivery, blamed as too Asiatic, were less successful. To a reader the three seem much on the same level. They are clever, but evidently set performances, and leave us no ground to suppose that the poet's abandonment of a parliamentary career was a serious loss to the nation.

On the 29th of February the first and second cantos of *Childe Harold* appeared. An early copy was sent to Mrs. Leigh, with the inscription: "To Augusta, my dearest sister and my best friend, who has ever loved me much better than I deserved, this volume is presented by her father's son and most affectionate brother, B." The book ran through seven editions in four weeks. The effect of the first edition of Burns, and the sale of Scott's *Lays*, are the only parallels in modern poetic literature to this success. All eyes were suddenly fastened on the author, who let his satire sleep, and threw politics aside, to be the romancer of his day and for two years the darling of society. Previous to the publication, Mr. Moore confesses to have gratified his lordship with the expression of the fear that *Childe Harold* was too good for the age. Its success was due to the reverse being the truth. It was just on the level of its age. Its flowing verse, defaced by rhymical faults perceptible only to finer ears, its prevailing sentiment, occasional boldness relieved by pleasing platitudes, its half affected rakishness, here and there elevated by a rush as of morning air, and its frequent richness—not yet, as afterwards, splendour—of description, were all appreciated by the

fashionable London of the Regency ; while the comparatively mild satire, not keen enough to scarify, only gave a more piquant flavour to the whole. Byron's genius, yet in the green leaf, was not too far above the clever masses of pleasure-loving manhood by which it was surrounded. It was natural that the address on the reopening of Drury Lane theatre should be written by "the world's new joy"—the first great English poet-peer ; as natural as that in his only published satire of the period he should inveigh against almost the only amusement in which he could not share. The address was written at the request of Lord Holland, when of some hundred competitive pieces none had been found exactly suitable—a circumstance which gave rise to the famous parodies entitled *The Rejected Addresses*—and it was thought that the ultimate choice would conciliate all rivalry. The care which Byron bestowed on the correction of the first draft of this piece, is characteristic of his habit of writing off his poems at a gush, and afterwards carefully elaborating them.

The Waltz was published anonymously in April, 1813. It was followed in May by the *Giaour*, the first of the flood of verse romances which, during the three succeeding years, he poured forth with impetuous fluency, and which were received with almost unrestrained applause. The plots and sentiments and imagery are similar in them all. The *Giaour* steals the mistress of Hassan, who revenges his honour by drowning her. The *Giaour* escapes ; returns, kills Hassan, and then goes to a monastery. In the *Bride of Abydos*, published in the December of the same year, Giaffir wants to marry his daughter Zuleika to Carasman Pasha. She runs off with Selim, her reputed brother—in reality her cousin, and so

at last her legitimate lover. They are caught ; he is slain in fight ; she dies, to slow music. In the *Corsair*, published January, 1814, Conrad, a pirate, "linked with one virtue and a thousand crimes !" is beloved by Medora, who on his predatory expeditions, sits waiting for him (like Hassan's and Sisera's mother) in a tower. On one of these he attacks Seyd Pasha, and is overborne by superior force ; but Gulnare, a female slave of Seyd, kills her master, and runs off with Conrad, who finds Medora dead and vanishes. In *Lara*, the sequel to this—written in May and June, published in August—a man of mystery appears in the Morea, with a page, Kaled. After adventures worthy of Mrs. Radcliffe—from whose Schledoni the Giaour is said to have been drawn—Lara falls in battle with his deadly foe, Ezzelin, and turns out to be Conrad, while Kaled is of course Gulnare. The *Hebrew Melodies*, written in December, 1814, are interesting, in connexion with the author's early familiarity with the Old Testament, and from the force and music that mark the best of them ; but they can hardly be considered an important contribution to the devotional verse of England. The *Siege of Corinth* and *Parisina*, composed after his marriage in the summer and autumn of 1815, appeared in the following year. The former is founded on the siege of the city, when the Turks took it from Menotti ; but our attention is concentrated on Alp the renegade, another sketch from the same protoplasmic ruffian, who leads on the Turks, is in love with the daughter of the governor of the city, tries to save her, but dies. The poem is frequently vigorous, but it ends badly. *Parisina*, though unequal, is on the whole a poem of a higher order than the others of the period. The trial scene exhibits some dramatic power, and the shriek of the lady mingling

with Ugo's funeral dirge lingers in our ears, along with the convent bells—

In the grey square turret swinging,
With a deep sound, to and fro,
Heavily to the heart they go.

These romances belong to the same period of the author's poetic career as the first two cantos of *Childe Harold*. They followed one another like brilliant fireworks. They all exhibit a command of words, a sense of melody, and a flow of rhythm and rhyme, which mastered Moore and even Scott on their own ground. None of them are wanting in passages, as "He who hath bent him o'er the dead," and the description of Alp leaning against a column, which strike deeper than any verse of either of those writers. But there is an air of melodrama in them all. Harmonious delights of novel readers, they will not stand against the winnowing wind of deliberate criticism. They harp on the same string, without the variations of a Paganini. They are potentially endless reproductions of one phase of an ill-regulated mind—the picture of the same quasi-melancholy vengeful man, who knows no friend but a dog, and reads on the tombs of the great only "the glory and the nothing of a name," the exile who cannot flee from himself, "the wandering outlaw of his own dark mind," who has not loved the world nor the world him,—

Whose heart was form'd for softness, warp'd by wrong,
Betray'd too early, and beguiled too long—

all this, *decies repetita*, grows into a weariness and vexation. Mr. Carlyle harshly compares it to the screaming of a meat-jack. The reviewers and the public of the

time thought differently. Jeffrey, penitent for the early *faux pas* of his *Review*, as Byron remained penitent for his answering assault, writes of *Lara*, "Passages of it may be put into competition with anything that poetry has produced in point either of pathos or energy." Moore—who afterwards wrote, not to Byron, that seven devils had entered into *Manfred*—professes himself "enraptured with it." Fourteen thousand copies of the *Corsair* were sold in a day. But hear the author's own half-boast, half-apology: "*Lara* I wrote while undressing after coming home from balls and masquerades, in the year of revelry 1814. The *Bride* was written in four, the *Corsair* in ten days. This I take to be a humiliating confession, as it proves my own want of judgment in publishing, and the public's in reading, things which cannot have stamina for permanence."

The pecuniary profits accruing to Byron from his works began with *Lara*, for which he received 700*l*. He had made over to Mr. Dallas, besides other gifts to the same ungrateful recipient, the profits of *Harold*, amounting to 600*l*., and of the *Corsair*, which brought 525*l*. The proceeds of the *Giaour* and the *Bride* were also surrendered.

During this period, 1813—1816, he had become familiar with all the phases of London society, "tasted their pleasures," and, towards the close, "felt their decay." His associates in those years were of two classes—men of the world, and authors. Fêted and courted in all quarters, he patronized the theatres, became in 1815 a member of the Drury Lane Committee, "liked the dandies," including Beau Brummell, and was introduced to the Regent. Their interview, in June 1812, in the course of which the latter paid unrestrained compli-

ments to *Harold* and the poetry of Scott, is naively referred to by Mr. Moore "as reflecting even still more honour on the Sovereign himself than on the two poets." Byron, in a different spirit, writes to Lord Holland: "I have now great hope, in the event of Mr. Pye's decease, of warbling truth at Court, like Mr. Mallet of indifferent memory. Consider, one hundred marks a year! besides the wine and the disgrace." We can hardly conceive the future author of the *Vision of Judgment* writing odes to dictation. He does not seem to have been much fascinated with the first gentleman of Europe, whom at no distant date he assailed in the terrible "Avatar," and left the laureateship to Mr. Southey.

Among leaders in art and letters he was brought into more or less intimate contact with Sir Humphry Davy, the Edgeworths, Sir James Mackintosh, Colman the dramatic author, the elder Kean, Monk Lewis, Grattan, Curran, and Madame de Staël. Of a meeting of the last two he remarks, "It was like the confluence of the Rhone and the Saône, and they were both so ugly that I could not help wondering how the best intellects of France and Ireland could have taken up respectively such residences."

About this time a communication from Mr Murray in reference to the meeting with the Regent led to a letter from Sir Walter Scott to Lord Byron, the beginning of a life-long friendship, and one of the most pleasing pages of biography. These two great men were for a season perpetually pitted against one another, as the foremost competitors for literary favour. When *Rokeby* came out, contemporaneously with the *Giaour*, the undergraduates of Oxford and Cambridge ran races to catch the first copies, and laid bets as to which of the rivals would win. During the

anti-Byronic fever of 1840—1860 they were perpetually contrasted as the representatives of the manly and the morbid schools. A later sentimentalism has affected to despise the work of both. The fact therefore that from an early period the men themselves knew each other as they were, is worth illustrating.

Scott's letter, in which a generous recognition of the pleasure he had derived from the work of the English poet, was followed by a manly remonstrance on the subject of the attack in the *Bards and Reviewers*, drew from Byron in the following month (July 1812) an answer in the same strain, descanting on the Prince's praises of the *Lay* and *Marmion*, and candidly apologizing for the "evil works of his nonage." "The satire," he remarks, "was written when I was very young and very angry, and fully bent on displaying my wrath and my wit; and now I am haunted by the ghosts of my wholesale assertions." This, in turn, called forth another letter to Byron eager for more of his verses, with a cordial invitation to Abbotsford on the ground of Scotland's maternal claim on him, and asking for information about Pegasus and Parnassus. After this the correspondence continues with greater freedom, and the same display on either side of mutual respect. When Scott says "the *Giaour* is praised among our mountains," and Byron returns "*Waverley* is the best novel I have read," there is no suspicion of flattery—it is the interchange of compliments between men,

Et cantare paros et respondere parati.

They talk in just the same manner to third parties. "I gave over writing romances," says the elder, in the spirit of a great-hearted gentleman, "because Byron beat me. He

hits the mark, where I don't even pretend to fledge my arrow. He has access to a stream of sentiment unknown to me." The younger, on the other hand, deprecates the comparisons that were being invidiously drawn between them. He presents his copy of the *Giaour* to Scott, with the phrase "To the monarch of Parnassus," and compares the feeling of those who cavilled at his fame to that of the Athenians towards Aristides. From those sentiments, he never swerves, recognizing to the last the breadth of character of the most generous of his critics, and referring to him, during his later years in Italy, as the Wizard and the Ariosto of the North. A meeting was at length arranged between them. Scott looked forward to it with anxious interest, humorously remarking that Byron should say,—

Art thou the man whom men famed Grissell call?

And he reply—

Art thou the still more famed Tom Thumb the small?

They met in London during the spring of 1815. The following sentences are from Sir Walter's account of it : —"Report had prepared me to meet a man of peculiar habits and quick temper, and I had some doubts whether we were likely to suit each other in society. I was most agreeably disappointed in this respect. I found Lord Byron in the highest degree courteous, and even kind. We met for an hour or two almost daily in Mr. Murray's drawing-room, and found a great deal to say to each other. Our sentiments agreed a good deal, except upon the subjects of religion and politics, upon neither of which I was inclined to believe that Lord Byron entertained very fixed opinions. On politics he used sometimes to express a high

strain of what is now called Liberalism ; but it appeared to me that the pleasure it afforded him as a vehicle of displaying his wit and satire against individuals in office was at the bottom of this habit of thinking. At heart, I would have termed Byron a patrician on principle. His reading did not seem to me to have been very extensive. I remember repeating to him the fine poem of Hardyknute, and some one asked me what I could possibly have been telling Byron by which he was so much agitated. I saw him for the last time in (September) 1815, after I returned from France ; he dined or lunched with me at Long's in Bond Street. I never saw him so full of gaiety and good humour. The day of this interview was the most interesting I ever spent. Several letters passed between us—one perhaps every half year. Like the old heroes in Homer we exchanged gifts ; I gave Byron a beautiful dagger mounted with gold, which had been the property of the redoubted Elfi Bey. But I was to play the part of Diomed in the *Iliad*, for Byron sent me, some time after, a large sepulchral vase of silver, full of dead men's bones, found within the land walls of Athens. He was often melancholy, almost gloomy. When I observed him in this humour I used either to wait till it went off of its own accord, or till some natural and easy mode occurred of leading him into conversation, when the shadows almost always left his countenance, like the mist arising from a landscape. I think I also remarked in his temper starts of suspicion, when he seemed to pause and consider whether there had not been a secret and perhaps offensive meaning in something that was said to him. In this case I also judged it best to let his mind, like a troubled spring, work itself clear, which it did in a minute or two. A downright steadiness of manner was the way to his good

opinion. Will Rose, looking by accident at his feet, saw him scowling furiously; but on his showing no consciousness, his lordship resumed his easy manner. What I liked about him, besides his boundless genius, was his generosity of spirit as well as of purse, and his utter contempt of all the affectations of literature. He liked Moore and me because, with all our other differences, we were both good-natured fellows, not caring to maintain our dignity, enjoying the *mot-pour-rire*. He wrote from impulse never from effort, and therefore I have always reckoned Burns and Byron the most genuine poetic geniuses of my time, and of half a century before me. We have many men of high poetic talents, but none of that ever-gushing and perennial fountain of natural waters."

Scott, like all hale men of sound sense, regretted the almost fatal incontinence which, in the year of his greatest private troubles, led his friend to make a parade of them before the public. He speaks more than once of his unhappy tendency to exhibit himself as the dying gladiator, and even compares him to his peacock, screeching before his window because he chooses to bivouack apart from his mate; but he read a copy of the Ravenna diary without altering his view that his lordship was his own worst maligner. Scott, says Lockhart, considered Byron the only poet of transcendent talents we had had since Dryden. There is preserved a curious record of his meeting with a greater poet than Dryden, but one whose greatness neither he nor Scott suspected. Mr. Crabb Robinson reports Wordsworth to have said, in Charles Lamb's chambers, about the year 1808, "These reviewers put me out of patience. Here is a young man who has written a volume of poetry; and these fellows, just

because he is a lord, set upon him. The young man will do something, if he goes on as he has begun. But these reviewers seem to think that nobody may write poetry unless he lives in a garret." Years after, Lady Byron, on being told this, exclaimed, "Ah, if Byron had known that, he would never have attacked Wordsworth. He went one day to meet him at dinner, and I said, 'Well, how did the young poet get on with the old one?' 'Why, to tell the truth,' said he, 'I had but one feeling from the beginning of the visit to the end, and that was *reverence*.'" Similarly, he began by being on good terms with Southey, and after a meeting at Holland House, wrote enthusiastically of his prepossessing appearance.

Byron and the leaders of the so-called Lake School were, at starting, common heirs of the revolutionary spirit; they were, either in their social views or personal feelings, to a large extent influenced by the most morbid, though in some respects the most magnetic, genius of modern France, J. J. Rousseau; but their temperaments were in many respects fundamentally diverse; and the pre-established discord between them ere long began to make itself manifest in their following out widely divergent paths. Wordsworth's return to nature had been preluded by Cowper; that of Byron by Burns. The revival of the one ripened into a restoration of simpler manners and old beliefs; the other was the spirit of the storm. When they had both become recognized powers, neither appreciated the work of the other. A few years after this date Byron wrote of Wordsworth, to a common admirer of both: "I take leave to differ from you as freely as I once agreed with you. His performances, since the *Lyrical Ballads*, are miserably inadequate to the ability

that lurks within him. There is, undoubtedly, much natural talent spilt over the *Excursion*; but it is rain upon rocks, where it stands and stagnates; or rain upon sand, where it falls without fertilizing." This criticism with others in like strain, was addressed to Mr. Leigh Hunt, to whom, in 1812, when enduring for radicalism's sake a very comfortable incarceration, Byron had, in company with Moore, paid a courteous visit.

Of the correspondence of this period—flippant, trenchant, or sparkling—few portions are more calculated to excite a smile than the record of his frequent resolutions made, reasseverated, and broken, to have done with literature; even going the length on some occasions of threatening to suppress his works, and, if possible, recall the existing copies. He affected being a man of the world unmercifully, and had a real delight in clever companions who assumed the same rôle. Frequent allusion is made to his intercourse with Erskine and Sheridan: the latter he is never tired of praising, as "the author of the best modern comedy (*School for Scandal*), the best farce (*The Critic*), and the best oration (the famous Begum speech) ever heard in this country." They spent many an evening together, and probably cracked many a bottle. It is Byron who tells the story of Sheridan being found in a gutter in a sadly incapable state; and, on some one asking "Who is this?" stammering out "Wilberforce." On one occasion he speaks of coming out of a tavern with the dramatist, when they both found the staircase in a very cork-screw condition: and elsewhere, of encountering a Mr. C——, who "had no notion of meeting with a bon-vivant in a scribbler," and summed the poet's eulogy with the phrase, "he drinks like a man." Hunt, the tattler, who observed his lordship's habits in

Italy, with the microscope of malice ensconced within the same walls, makes it a charge against his host that he would not drink like a man. Once for all it may be noted, that although there was no kind of excess in which Byron, whether from bravado or inclination, failed occasionally to indulge, he was never for any stretch of time given over, like Burns, to what is technically termed intemperance. His head does not seem to have been strong, and under the influence of stimulants he may have been led to talk a great deal of his dangerous nonsense. But though he could not say, with Wordsworth, that only once, at Cambridge, had his brain been "excited by the fumes of wine," his prevailing sins were in other directions.

CHAPTER VI.

MARRIAGE, AND FAREWELL TO ENGLAND.

"As for poets," says Scott, "I have seen all the best of my time and country, and, though Burns had the most glorious eye imaginable, I never thought any of them would come up to an artist's notion of the character, except Byron. His countenance is a thing to dream of." Coleridge writes to the same effect, in language even stronger. We have from all sides similar testimony to the personal beauty which led the unhappiest of his devotees to exclaim, "That pale face is my fate!"

Southern critics, as Chasles, Castelar, even Mazzini, have dealt leniently with the poet's relations to the other sex; and Elze extends to him in this regard the same excessive stretch of charity. "Dear Childe Harold," exclaims the German professor, "was positively besieged by women. They have, in truth, no right to complain of him: from his childhood he had seen them on their worst side." It is the casuistry of hero-worship to deny that Byron was unjust to women, not merely in isolated instances, but in his prevailing views of their character and claims. "I regard them," he says, in a passage only distinguished from others by more extravagant petulance, "as very pretty but inferior creatures, who are as little in their place at our tables as they would be in our council

chambers. The whole of the present system with regard to the female sex is a remnant of the barbarism of the chivalry of our forefathers. I look on them as grown-up children ; but, like a foolish mamma, I am constantly the slave of one of them. The Turks shut up their women, and are much happier ; give a woman a looking-glass and burnt almonds, and she will be content."

In contrast with this, we have the moods in which he drew his pictures of Angiolina, and Haidee, and Aurora Raby, and wrote the invocations to the shade of Astarte, and his letters in prose and verse to Augusta ; but the above passage could never have been written by Chaucer, or Spenser, or Shakespeare, or Shelley. The class whom he was reviling seemed, however, during "the day of his destiny," bent on confirming his judgment by the blindness of their worship. His rank and fame, the glittering splendour of his verse, the romance of his travels, his picturesque melancholy and affectation of mysterious secrets, combined with the magic of his presence to bewitch and bewilder them. The dissenting malcontents, condemned as prudes and blues, had their revenge. Generally, we may say that women who had not written books adored Byron ; women who had written or were writing books distrusted, disliked, and made him a moral to adorn their tales, often to point their fables with. He was by the one set caressed and spoilt, and "beguiled too long ;" by the other, "betrayed too late." The recent memoirs of Frances Ann Kemble present a curious record of the process of passing from one extreme to the other. She dwells on the fascination exerted over her mind by the first reading of his poetry, and tells how she "fastened on the book with a grip like steel," and carried it off and hid it under her pillow ; how it affected her

"like an evil potion," and stirred her whole being with a tempest of excitement, till finally she, with equal weakness, flung it aside, "resolved to read that grand poetry no more, and broke through the thralldom of that powerful spell." The confession brings before us a type of the transitions of the century, on its way from the Byronic to the anti-Byronic fever, of which later state Mrs. Norton and Miss Martineau are among the most pronounced representatives.

Byron's garrulity with regard to those delicate matters on which men of more prudence or chivalry are wont to set the seal of silence, has often the same practical effect as reticence; for he talks so much at large—every page of his *Journal* being, by his own admission, apt to "confute and abjure its predecessor"—that we are often none the wiser. Amid a mass of conjecture, it is manifest that during the years between his return from Greece and final expatriation (1811—1816), including the whole period of his social glory—though not yet of his solid fame—he was lured into liaisons of all sorts and shades. Some, now acknowledged as innocent, were blared abroad by tongues less skilled in pure invention than in distorting truth. On others, as commonplaces of a temperament "all meridian," it were waste of time to dwell. Byron rarely put aside a pleasure in his path; but his passions were seldom unaccompanied by affectionate emotions, genuine while they lasted. The verses to the memory of a lost love veiled as "Thyrza," of moderate artistic merit, were not, as Moore alleges, mere plays of imagination, but records of a sincere grief.¹ Another intimacy exerted so much influence on this

¹ Mr. Trelawny says that Thyrza was a cousin, but that on this subject Byron was always reticent. Mr. Minto, as we have seen, associates her with the disguised girl of 1807-8.

phase of the poet's career, that to pass it over would be like omitting Vanessa's name from the record of Swift. Lady Caroline Lamb, granddaughter of the first Earl Spencer, was one of those few women of our climate who, by their romantic impetuosity, recall the "children of the sun." She read Burns in her ninth year, and in her thirteenth idealized William Lamb (afterwards Lord Melbourne) as a statue of Liberty. In her nineteenth (1805) she married him, and lived for some years, during which she was a reigning belle and toast, a domestic life only marred by occasional eccentricities. Rogers, whom in a letter to Lady Morgan she numbers among her lovers, said she ought to know the new poet, who was three years her junior, and the introduction took place in March, 1812. After the meeting, she wrote in her journal, "Mad—bad—and dangerous to know;" but, when the fashionable Apollo called at Melbourne House, she "flew to beautify herself." Flushed by his conquest, he spent a great part of the following year in her company, during which time the apathy or self-confidence of the husband laughed at the worship of the hero. "Conrad" detailed his travels and adventures, interested her, by his woes, dictated her amusements, invited her guests, and seems to have set rules to the establishment. "Medora," on the other hand, made no secret of her devotion, declared that they were affinities, and offered him her jewels. But after the first excitement, he began to grow weary of her talk about herself, and could not praise her indifferent verses: "he grew moody, and she fretful, when their mutual egotisms jarred." Byron at length concurred in her being removed for a season to her father's house in Ireland, on which occasion he wrote one of his glowing farewell letters. When she came back,

matters were little better. The would-be Juliet beset the poet with renewed advances, on one occasion penetrating to his rooms in the disguise of a page, on another threatening to stab herself with a pair of scissors, and again, developing into a Medea, offering her gratitude to any one who would kill him. "The 'Agnus' is furious," he writes to Hodgson, in February, 1813, in one of the somewhat ungenerous bursts to which he was too easily provoked. "You can have no idea of the horrible and absurd things she has said and done since (really from the best motives) I withdrew my homage. . . . The business of last summer I broke off, and now the amusement of the gentle fair is writing letters literally threatening my life." With one member of the family, Lady Melbourne, Mr. Lamb's mother, and sister of Sir Ralph Milbanke, he remained throughout on terms of pleasant intimacy. He appreciated the talent and sense, and was ready to profit by the experience and tact of "the cleverest of women." But her well-meant advice had unfortunate results, for it was on her suggestion that he became a suitor for the hand of her niece, Miss Milbanke. Byron first proposed to this lady in 1813; his offer was refused, but so graciously that they continued to correspond on friendly, which gradually grew into intimate terms, and his second offer, towards the close of the following year, was accepted.

After a series of vain protests, and petulant warnings against her cousin by marriage, who she said was punctual at church, and learned, and knew statistics, but was "not for Conrad, no, no, no!" Lady Caroline lapsed into an attitude of fixed hostility; and shortly after the crash came, and her predictions were realized, vented her wrath in the now almost forgotten novel of

Glenarvon, in which some of Byron's real features were represented in conjunction with many fantastic additions. Madame de Staël was kind enough to bring a copy of the book before his notice when they met on the Lake of Geneva, but he seems to have been less moved by it than by most attacks. We must however, bear in mind his own admission in a parallel case. "I say I am perfectly calm; I am, nevertheless, in a fury." Over the sad vista of the remaining years of the unhappy lady's life we need not linger. During a considerable part of it she appears hovering about the thin line that separates some kinds of wit and passion from madness; writing more novels, burning her hero's effigy and letters, and then clamouring for a lock of his hair, or a sight of his portrait; separated from, and again reconciled to, a husband to whose magnanimous forbearance and compassion she bears testimony to the last, comparing herself to Jane Shore; attempting Byronic verses, loudly denouncing and yet never ceasing inwardly to idolize, the man whom she regarded as her betrayer, perhaps only with justice in that he had unwittingly helped to overthrow her mental balance. After eight years of this life, lit up here and there by gleams of social brilliancy, we find her carriage, on the 12th of July, 1824, suddenly confronted by a funeral. On hearing that the remains of Byron were being carried to the tomb, she shrieked, and fainted. Her health finally sank, and her mind gave way under this shock; but she lingered till January, 1828, when she died, after writing a calm letter to her husband, and bequeathing the poet's miniature to her friend, Lady Morgan.

"I have paid some of my debts, and contracted

others," Byron writes to Moore, on September 15th, 1814; "but I have a few thousand pounds which I can't spend after my heart in this climate, and so I shall go back to the south. I want to see Venice and the Alps, and Parmesan cheeses, and look at the coast of Greece from Italy. All this however depends upon an event which may or may not happen. Whether it will I shall probably know to-morrow, and if it does I can't well go abroad at present." "A wife," he had written, in the January of the same year, "would be my salvation;" but a marriage entered upon in such a flippant frame of mind could scarcely have been other than disastrous. In the autumn of the year we are told that a friend,² observing how cheerless was the state both of his mind and prospects, advised him to marry, and after much discussion he consented, naming to his correspondent Miss Milbanke. To this his adviser objected, remarking that she had, at present, no fortune, and that his embarrassed affairs would not allow him to marry without one, &c. Accordingly, he agreed that his friend should write a proposal to another lady, which was done. A refusal arrived as they were one morning sitting together. "'You see,' said Lord Byron, 'that after all Miss Milbanke is to be the person,' and wrote on the moment. His friend, still remonstrating against his choice, took up the letter; but, on reading it, observed, 'Well, really, this is a very pretty letter; it is a pity it should not go.' 'Then it *shall* go,' said Lord Byron, and, in so saying, sealed and sent off this fiat of his fate." The incident seems cut from a French novel; but so does the whole strange story—the one apparently insoluble enigma in an otherwise only too transparent life. On the arrival of the lady's

² Doubtless Moore himself, who tells the story.

answer he was seated at dinner, when his gardener came in, and presented him with his mother's wedding-ring, lost many years before, and which had just been found, buried in the mould beneath her window. Almost at the same moment the letter arrived ; and Byron exclaimed, " If it contains a consent (which it did), I will be married with this very ring." He had the highest anticipations of his bride, appreciating her "talents, and excellent qualities ;" and saying, "she is so good a person that I wish I was a better." About the same date he writes to various friends in the good spirits raised by his enthusiastic reception from the Cambridge undergraduates, when in the course of the same month he went to the Senate House to give his vote for a Professor of Anatomy.

The most constant and best of those friends was his sister, Augusta Leigh, whom, from the death of Miss Chaworth to his own, Byron, in the highest and purest sense of the word, loved more than any other human being. Tolerant of errors, which she lamented, and violences in which she had no share, she had a touch of their common family pride, most conspicuous in an almost cat-like clinging to their ancestral home. Her early published letters are full of regrets about the threatened sale of Newstead, on the adjournment of which, when the first purchaser had to pay 25,000*l.* for breaking his bargain, she rejoices, and over the consummation of which she mourns, in the manner of Milton's Eve—

Must I then leave thee, Paradise ?

In all her references to the approaching marriage there are blended notes of hope and fear. In thanking Hodgson for his kind congratulations, she trusts it will secure her brother's happiness. Later she adds her testimony to that of all outsiders at this time, as to the graces and

genuine worth of the object of his choice. After the usual preliminaries, the ill-fated pair were united, at Seaham House, on the 2nd of January, 1815. Byron was married like one walking in his sleep. He trembled like a leaf, made the wrong responses, and almost from the first seems to have been conscious of his irrevocable mistake.

I saw him stand
Before an altar with a gentle bride :
Her face was fair, but was not that which made
The starlight of his boyhood. He could see
Not that which was—but that which should have been—
But the old mansion, the accustom'd hall.
And she who was his destiny came back,
And thrust herself between him and the light.

Here we have faint visions of Miss Chaworth, mingling with later memories. In handing the bride into the carriage he said, "Miss Milbanke, are you ready?"—a mistake said to be of evil omen. Byron never really loved his wife ; and though he has been absurdly accused of marrying for revenge, we must suspect that he married in part for a settlement. On the other hand, it is not unfair to say that she was fascinated by a name, and inspired by the philanthropic zeal of reforming a literary Corsair. Both were disappointed. Miss Milbanke's fortune was mainly settled on herself ; and Byron, in spite of plentiful resolutions gave little sign of reformation. For a considerable time their life, which, after the "treacle moon," as the bridegroom called it, spent at Halnaby, near Darlington, was divided between residence at Seaham and visits to London, seemed to move smoothly. In a letter, evidently mis-dated the 15th December, Mrs. Leigh writes to Hodgson : "I have every reason to think that my beloved B. is very happy and comfortable. I hear

constantly from him and *his rib*. It appears to me that Lady B. sets about making him happy in the right way. I had many fears. Thank God that they do not appear likely to be realized. In short, there seems to me to be but one drawback to all our felicity, and that, alas, is the disposal of dear Newstead. I never shall feel reconciled to the loss of that sacred revered Abbey. The thought makes me more melancholy than perhaps the loss of an inanimate object ought to do. Did you ever hear that *landed property*, the GIFT OF THE CROWN, could not be sold? Lady B. writes me word that she never saw her father and mother so happy; that she believes the latter would go to the bottom of the sea herself to find fish for B.'s dinner, &c." Augusta Ada was born in London on the 10th of December, 1815. During the next months a few cynical mutterings are the only interruptions to an ominous silence; but these could be easily explained by the increasing embarrassment of the poet's affairs, and the importunity of creditors, who in the course of the last half-year had served seven or eight executions on his house and furniture. Their expectations were raised by exaggerated reports of his having married money; and by a curious pertinacity of pride he still declined, even when he had to sell his books, to accept advances from his publisher. In January the storm which had been secretly gathering suddenly broke. On the 15th, i.e. five weeks after her daughter's birth, Lady Byron left home with the infant to pay a visit, as had been agreed, to her own family at Kirkby Mallory in Leicestershire. On the way she despatched to her husband a tenderly playful letter, which has been often quoted. Shortly afterwards he was informed—first by her father, and then by herself—that she did not intend

ever to return to him. The accounts of their last interview, as in the whole evidence bearing on the affair, not only differ but flatly contradict one another. On behalf of Lord Byron it is asserted, that his wife, infuriated by his offering some innocent hospitality on occasion of bad weather to a respectable actress, Mrs. Mardyn, who had called on him about Drury Lane business, rushed into the room exclaiming, "I leave you for ever"—and did so. According to another story, Lady Byron, finding him with a friend, and observing him to be annoyed at her entrance, said, "Am I in your way, Byron?" whereupon he answered, "Damnably." Mrs. Leigh, Hodgson, Moore, and others, did everything that mutual friends could do to bring about the reconciliation for which Byron himself professed to be eager, but in vain; and in vain the effort was renewed in later years. The wife was inveterately bent on a separation, of the causes of which the husband alleged he was never informed, and with regard to which as long as he lived she preserved a rigid silence.

For some time after the event Byron spoke of his wife with at least apparent generosity. Rightly or wrongly, he blamed her parents, and her maid—Mrs. Clermont, the theme of his scathing but not always dignified "Sketch;" but of herself he wrote (March 8, 1816), "I do not believe that there ever was a brighter, and a kinder, or a more amiable or agreeable being than Lady Byron. I never had nor can have any reproach to make to her, when with me." Elsewhere he adds, that he would willingly, if he had the chance, "renew his marriage on a lease of twenty years." But as time passed and his overtures were rejected, his patience gave way, and in some of his later satires he even broke the bounds of courtesy. Lady Byron's letters

at the time of the separation, especially those first published in the *Academy* of July 19, 1879, are to Mrs. Leigh always affectionate and confidential, often pathetic, asking her advice "in this critical moment," and protesting that, "independent of malady, she does not think of the past with any spirit of resentment, and scarcely with the sense of injury." In her communications to Mr. Hodgson, on the other hand—the first of almost the same date, the second a few weeks later—she writes with intense bitterness, stating that her action was due to offences which she could only condone on the supposition of her husband's insanity, and distinctly implying that she was in danger of her life. This supposition having been by her medical advisers pronounced erroneous, she felt, in the words only too pungently recalled in *Don Juan*, that her duty both to man and God prescribed her course of action. Her playful letter on leaving she seems to defend on the ground of the fear of personal violence. Till Lord Byron's death the intimacy between his wife and sister remained unbroken; through the latter he continued to send numerous messages to the former, and to his child, who became a ward in Chancery; but at a later date it began to cool. On the appearance of Lady Byron's letter, in answer to Moore's first volume, Augusta speaks of it as "a despicable tirade," feels "disgusted at such unfeeling conduct," and thinks "nothing can justify any one in defaming the dead." Soon after 1830 they had an open rupture on a matter of business, which was never really healed, though the then Puritanic precisian sent a message of relenting to Mrs. Leigh on her death-bed (1851).

The charge or charges which, during her husband's life, Lady Byron from magnanimity or other motive reserved,

she is ascertained after his death to have delivered with important modifications to various persons, with little regard to their capacity for reading evidence or to their discretion. On one occasion her choice of a confidante was singularly unfortunate. "These," wrote Lord Byron in his youth, "these are the first tidings that have ever sounded like fame in my ears—to be redde on the banks of the Ohio." Strangely enough, it is from the country of Washington, whom the poet was wont to reverence as the purest patriot of the modern world, that in 1869 there emanated the hideous story which scandalized both continents, and ultimately recoiled on the retailer of the scandal. The grounds of the reckless charge have been weighed by those who have wished it to prove false, and by those who have wished it to prove true, and found wanting. The chaff has been beaten in every way and on all sides, without yielding an ounce of grain ; and it were ill-advised to rake up the noxious dust that alone remains. From nothing left on record by either of the two persons most intimately concerned can we derive any reliable information. It is plain that Lady Byron was during the later years of her life the victim of hallucinations, and that if Byron knew the secret, which he denies, he did not choose to tell it, putting off Captain Medwin and others with absurdities, as that "He did not like to see women eat," or with commonplaces, as "The causes, my dear sir, were too simple to be found out."

Thomas Moore, who had the *Memoirs*¹ supposed to have thrown light on the mystery, in the full knowledge of Dr. Lushington's judgment and all the gossip of the day, professes to believe that "the causes of disunion did not differ from those that loosen the links

¹ Captain Trelawney, however, doubts if he ever read them.

of most such marriages," and writes several pages on the trite theme that great genius is incompatible with domestic happiness. Negative instances abound to modify this sweeping generalization; but there is a kind of genius, closely associated with intense irritability, which it is difficult to subject to the most reasonable yoke; and of this sort was Byron's. His valet, Fletcher, is reported to have said that "Any woman could manage my lord, except my lady;" and Madame De Staël, on reading the *Farewell*, that "She would have been glad to have been in Lady Byron's place." But it may be doubted if Byron would have made a good husband to any woman; his wife and he were even more than usually ill-assorted. A model of the proprieties, and a pattern of the learned philanthropy of which in her sex he was wont to make a constant butt, she was no fit consort for that "*mens insana in corpore insano*." What could her stolid temperament conjecture of a man whom she saw, in one of his fits of passion, throwing a favourite watch under the fire, and grinding it to pieces with a poker? Or how could her conscious virtue tolerate the recurring irregularities which he was accustomed, not only to permit himself, but to parade? The harassment of his affairs stimulated his violence, till she was inclined to suspect him to be mad. Some of her recently printed letters—as that to Lady Anne Barnard, and the reports of later observers of her character—as William Howitt, tend to detract from the earlier tributes to her consistent amiability, and confirm our ideas of the incompatibility of the pair. It must have been trying to a poet to be asked by his wife, impatient of his late hours, when he was going to leave off writing verses; to be told he had no real enthusiasm; or to have his desk broken open, and its

compromising contents sent to the persons for whom they were least intended. The smouldering elements of discontent may have been fanned by the gossip of dependants, or the officious zeal of relatives, and kindled into a jealous flame by the ostentation of regard for others beyond the circle of his home. Lady Byron doubtless believed some story which, when communicated to her legal advisers, led them to the conclusion that the mere fact of her believing it made reconciliation impossible ; and the inveterate obstinacy which lurked beneath her gracious exterior, made her cling through life to the substance—not always to the form, whatever that may have been—of her first impressions. Her later letters to Mrs. Leigh, as that called forth by Moore's *Life*, are certainly as open to the charge of self-righteousness, as those of her husband's are to self-disparagement.

Byron himself somewhere says, "Strength of endurance is worth all the talent in the world." "I love the virtues that I cannot share." His own courage was all active ; he had no power of sustained endurance. At a time when his proper refuge was silence, and his prevailing sentiment—for he admits he was somehow to blame—should have been remorse, he foolishly vented his anger and his grief in verses, most of them either peevish or vindictive, and some of which he certainly permitted to be published. "Woe to him," exclaims Voltaire, "who says all he could on any subject !" Woe to him, he might have added, who says anything at all on the subject of his domestic troubles ! The poet's want of reticence at this crisis started a host of conjectures, accusations, and calumnies, the outcome, in some degree at least, of the rancorous jealousy of men of whose adulation he was weary. Then began that burst of British virtue on which

Macaulay has expatiated, and at which the social critics of the continent have laughed. Cottle, Cato, Oxoniensis, Delia, and Styles, were let loose, and they anticipated the *Saturday* and the *Spectator* of 1869, so that the latter might well have exclaimed, "Pereant qui ante nos nostra dixerunt." Byron was accused of every possible and impossible vice. He was compared to Sardanapalus, Nero, Tiberius, the Duke of Orleans, Heliogabalus, and Satan—all the most disreputable persons mentioned in sacred and profane history; his benevolences were maligned, his most disinterested actions perverted. Mrs. Mardyn, the actress, was on his account, on one occasion, driven off the public stage. He was advised not to go to the theatres, lest he should be hissed; nor to Parliament, lest he should be insulted. On the very day of his departure a friend told him that he feared violence from mobs assembling at the door of his carriage. "Upon what grounds," the poet writes, in a trenchant survey of the circumstances, in August, 1819, "the public formed their opinion, I am not aware; but it was general, and it was decisive. Of me and of mine they knew little, except that I had written poetry, was a nobleman, had married, became a father, and was involved in differences with my wife and her relatives—no one knew why, because the persons complaining refused to state their grievances.

"The press was active and scurrilous; . . . my name—which had been a knightly or a noble one since my fathers helped to conquer the kingdom for William the Norman—was tainted. I felt that, if what was whispered and muttered and murmured was true, I was unfit for England; if false, England was unfit for me. I withdrew; but this was not enough. In

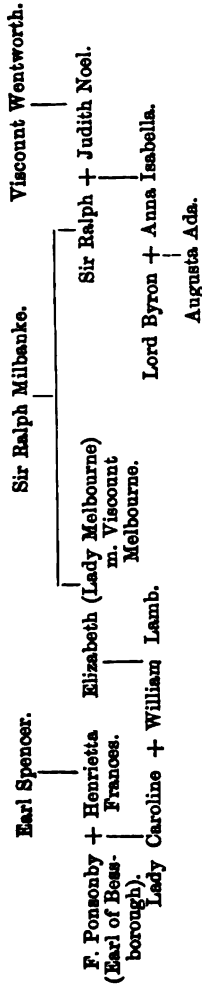
other countries — in Switzerland, in the shadow of the Alps, and by the blue depth of the lakes—I was pursued and breathed upon by the same blight. I crossed the mountains, but it was the same ; so I went a little farther, and settled myself by the waves of the Adriatic, like the stag at bay, who betakes himself to the waters.”

On the 16th of April, 1816, shortly before his departure, he wrote to Mr. Rogers : “ My sister is now with me, and leaves town to-morrow. We shall not meet again for some time, at all events, if ever (it was their final meeting), and under these circumstances I trust to stand excused to you and Mr. Sheridan for being unable to wait upon him this evening.” In all this storm and stress, Byron’s one refuge was in the affection which rises like a well of purity amid the passions of his turbid life.

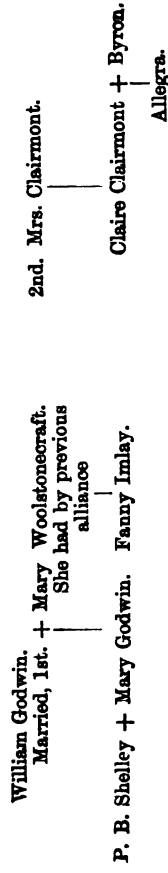
In the desert a fountain is springing,
In the wild waste there still is a tree ;
And a bird in the solitude singing,
That speaks to my spirit of thee.

The fashionable world was tired of its spoilt child, and he of it. Hunted out of the country, bankrupt in purse and heart, he left it, never to return ; but he left it to find fresh inspiration by the “ rushing of the arrowy Rhone,” and under Italian skies to write the works which have immortalized his name.

• DESCENT OF LADY BYRON AND LADY C. LAMB.



DESCENT OF ALLEGRA



CHAPTER VII.

LIFE ABROAD.—SWITZERLAND TO VENICE.—THIRD PERIOD OF
AUTHORSHIP.—CHILDE HAROLD, III., IV.—MANFRED.

On the 25th of April, 1816, Byron embarked for Ostend. From the "burning marl" of the staring streets he planted his foot again on the deck with a genuine exultation.

Once more upon the waters, yet once more,
And the waves bound beneath me as a steed
That knows her rider. Welcome to the roar!

But he brought with him a relic of English extravagance, setting out on his land travels in a huge coach, copied from that of Napoleon taken at Genappe, and being accompanied by Fletcher, Rushton, Berger, a Swiss, and Polidori, a physician of Italian descent, son of Alfieri's secretary, a man of some talent but indiscreet. A question arises as to the source from which he obtained the means for these and subsequent luxuries, in striking contrast with Goldsmith's walking-stick, knapsack, and flute. Byron's financial affairs are almost inextricably confused. We can, for instance, nowhere find a clear statement of the result of the suit regarding the Rochdale Estates, save that he lost it before the Court of Exchequer, and that his appeal to the House of Lords was still unsettled in 1822. The sale of Newstead to Colonel Wildman in 1818, for 90,000*l.*, went mostly to pay off mortgages and

debts. In April, 1819, Mrs. Leigh writes, after a last sigh over this event :—"Sixty thousand pounds was secured by his (Byron's) marriage settlement, the interest of which he receives for life, and which ought to make him very comfortable." This is unfortunately decisive of the fact that he did not in spirit adhere to the resolution expressed to Moore never to touch a farthing of his wife's money, though we may accept his statement to Medwin, that he twice repaid the dowry of 10,000*l.* brought to him at the marriage, as in so far diminishing the obligation. None of the capital of Lady Byron's family came under his control till 1822, when, on the death of her mother, Lady Noel, Byron arranged the appointment of referees, Sir Francis Burdett on his behalf, Lord Dacre on his wife's. The result was an equal division of a property worth about 7000*l.* a year. While in Italy the poet received besides about 10,000*l.* for his writings—4000*l.* being given for *Childe Harold* (iii., iv.), and *Manfred*. "Ne pas être dupe" was one of his determinations, and, though he began by caring little for making money, he was always fond of spending it. "I tell you it is too much," he said to Murray, in returning a thousand guineas for the *Corinth* and *Parisina*. Hodgson, Moore, Bland, Thomas Ashe, the family of Lord Falkland, the British Consul at Venice, and a host of others, were ready to testify to his superb munificence. On the other hand, he would stint his pleasures, or his benevolences, which were among them, for no one; and when he found that to spend money he had to make it, he saw neither rhyme nor reason in accepting less than his due. In 1817 he begins to dun Murray, declaring, with a frankness in which we can find no fault, "You offer 1500 guineas for the new canto

(*C. H.*, iv.). I won't take it. I ask 2500 guineas for it, which you will either give or not, as you think proper." During the remaining years of his life he grew more and more exact, driving hard bargains for his houses, horses, and boats, and fitting himself, had he lived, to be Chancellor of the Exchequer in the newly-liberated State, from which he took a bond securing a fair interest for his loan. He made out an account in £. s. d. against the ungrateful Dallas, and when Leigh Hunt threatened to sponge upon him he got a harsh reception; but there is nothing to countenance the view that Byron was ever really possessed by the "good old gentlemanly vice" of which he wrote. The Skimpoles and Chadbands of the world are always inclined to talk of filthy lucre: it is equally a fashion of really lavish people to boast that they are good men of business.

We have only a few glimpses of Byron's progress. At Brussels the Napoleonic coach was set aside for a more serviceable caleche. During his stay in the Belgian capital he paid a visit to the scene of Waterloo, wrote the famous stanzas beginning, "Stop, for thy tread is on an empire's dust!" and in unpatriotic prose, recorded his impressions of a plain which appeared to him to "want little but a better cause" to make it vie in interest with those of Platea and Marathon.

The rest of his journey lay up the Rhine to Basle, thence to Berne, Lausanne, and Geneva, where he settled for a time at the Hôtel Secheron, on the western shore of the lake. Here began the most interesting literary relationship of his life, for here he first came in contact with the impassioned Ariel of English verse, Percy Bysshe Shelley. They lived in proximity after they left the hotel, Shelley's headquarters being at Mont Alégre, and Byron's for the

remainder of the summer at the Villa Diodati; and their acquaintance rapidly ripened into an intimacy which, with some interruptions, extended over the six remaining years of their joint lives. The place for an estimate of their mutual influence belongs to the time of their Italian partnership. Meanwhile, we hear of them mainly as fellow-excursionists about the lake, which on one occasion departing from its placid poetical character, all but swallowed them both, along with Hobhouse, off Meillerie. "The boat," says Byron, "was nearly wrecked near the very spot where St. Preux and Julia were in danger of being drowned. It would have been classical to have been lost there, but not agreeable. I ran no risk, being so near the rocks and a good swimmer; but our party were wet and incommoded." The only anxiety of Shelley, who could not swim, was, that no one else should risk a life for his. Two such revolutionary or such brave poets were, in all probability, never before nor since in a storm in a boat together. During this period Byron complains of being still persecuted. "I was in a wretched state of health and worse spirits when I was in Geneva; but quiet and the lake—better physicians than Polidori—soon set me up. I never led so moral a life as during my residence in that country, but I gained no credit by it. On the contrary, there is no story so absurd that they did not invent at my cost. I was watched by glasses on the opposite side of the lake, and by glasses, too, that must have had very distorted optics. I was waylaid in my evening drives. I believe they looked upon me as a man-monster." Shortly after his arrival in Switzerland he contracted an intimacy with Miss Clairmont, a daughter of Godwin's second wife, and consequently a connexion by marriage of the Shelleys, with whom she was living, which resulted in the birth of

a daughter, Allegra, at Great Marlow, in February, 1817. The noticeable events of the following two months are a joint excursion to Chamouni, and a visit in July to Madame de Staël at Coppet, in the course of which he met Frederick Schlegel. During a wet week, when the families were reading together some German ghost stories, an idea occurred of imitating them, the main result of which was Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Byron contributed to the scheme a fragment of *The Vampire*, afterwards completed and published in the name of his patron by Polidori. The eccentricities of this otherwise amiable physician now began to give serious annoyance; his jealousy of Shelley grew to such a pitch that it resulted in the doctor's giving a challenge to the poet, at which the latter only laughed; but Byron, to stop further outbreaks of the kind, remarked, "Recollect that, though Shelley has scruples about duelling, I have none, and shall be at all times ready to take his place." Polidori had ultimately to be dismissed, and, after some years of vicissitude, committed suicide.

The Shelleys left for England in September, and Byron made an excursion with Hobhouse through the Bernese Oberland. They went by the Col de Jaman and the Simmenthal to Thun; then up the valley to the Staubbach, which he compares to the tail of the pale horse in the Apocalypse—not a very happy, though a striking comparison. Thence they proceeded over the Wengern to Grindelwald and the Rosenlau glacier; then back by Berne, Friburg, and Yverdun to Diodati. The following passage in reference to this tour may be selected as a specimen of his prose description, and of the ideas of mountaineering before the days of the Alpine Club:—

"Before ascending the mountain, went to the torrent again, the sun upon it forming a rainbow of the lower

part, of all colours but principally purple and gold, the bow moving as you move. I never saw anything like this; it is only in the sunshine. . . . Left the horses, took off my coat, and went to the summit, 7000 English feet above the level of the sea, and 5000 feet above the valley we left in the morning. On one side our view comprised the Jungfrau, with all her glaciers; then the Dent d'Argent, shining like truth; then the Eighers and the Wetterhorn. Heard the avalanches falling every five minutes. From where we stood on the Wengern Alp we had all these in view on one side; on the other, the clouds rose up from the opposite valley, curling up perpendicular precipices, like the foam of the ocean of hell during a spring tide; it was white and sulphury, and immeasurably deep in appearance. . . . Arrived at the Grindelwald; dined; mounted again, and rode to the higher glacier—like a frozen hurricane; starlight beautiful, but a devil of a path. Passed whole woods of withered pines, all withered; trunks stripped and barkless, branches lifeless; done by a single winter. Their appearance reminded me of me and my family."

Students of *Manfred* will recognize whole sentences, only slightly modified in its verse. Though Byron talks with contempt of authorship, there is scarce a fine phrase in his letters or journal which is not pressed into the author's service. He turns his deepest griefs to artistic gain, and uses five or six times for literary purposes the expression which seems to have dropped from him naturally about his household gods being shivered on his hearth. His account of this excursion concludes with a passage equally characteristic of his melancholy and incessant self-consciousness:—

"In the weather for this tour, I have been very

fortunate. . . . I was disposed to be pleased. I am a lover of nature, &c. . . . But in all this the recollection of bitterness, and more especially of recent and more home desolation, which must accompany me through life, have preyed upon me here ; and neither the music of the shepherd, the crashing of the avalanche, the torrent, the mountain, the glacier, the forest, nor the cloud, have for one moment lightened the weight upon my heart, nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty, and the power, and the glory around, above, and beneath me."

Such egotism in an idle man would only provoke impatience ; but Byron was, during the whole of this period, almost preternaturally active. Detained by bad weather at Ouchy for two days (June 26, 27), he wrote the *Prisoner of Chillon*, which, with its noble introductory sonnet on Bonnivard, in some respects surpasses any of his early romances. The opening lines,—

Lake Leman lies by Chillon's walls ;
A thousand feet in depth below,
Its massy waters meet and flow,—

bring before us in a few words the conditions of a hopeless bondage. The account of the prisoner himself, and of the lingering deaths of the brothers ; the first frenzy of the survivor, and the desolation which succeeds it—

I only loved : I only drew
The accursed breath of dungeon dew,—

the bird's song breaking on the night of his solitude ; his growing enamoured of despair, and regaining his freedom with a sigh, are all strokes from a master hand. From the same place, at the same date, he announces to Murray the completion of the third canto of *Childe*

Harold. The productiveness of July is portentous. During that month he wrote the *Monody on Sheridan*, *The Dream*, *Churchill's Grave*, the *Sonnet to Lake Lemán*, *Could I remount the River of my Years*, part of *Manfred*, *Prometheus*, the *Stanzas to Augusta*, beginning,

My sister! My sweet sister! If a name
Dearer and purer were, it should be thine;

and the terrible dream of *Darkness*, which at least in the ghastly power of the close, where the survivors meet by the lurid light of a dim altar fire, and die of each other's hideousness, surpasses Campbell's *Last Man*.¹ At Lausanne the poet made a pilgrimage to the haunts of Gibbon, broke a sprig from his acacia-tree, and carried off some rose leaves from his garden. Though entertaining friends, among them Mr. M. G. Lewis and Scrope Davies, he systematically shunned "the locust swarm of English tourists," remarking on their obtrusive platitudes; as when he heard one of them at Chamouni inquire, "Did you ever see anything more truly rural?" Ultimately he got tired of the Calvinistic Genevese—one of whom is said to have swooned as he entered the room—and early in October set out with Hobhouse for Italy. They crossed the Simplon, and proceeded by the Lago Maggiore to Milan, admiring the pass, but slighting the somewhat hothouse beauties of the Borromean Islands. From Milan he writes, pronouncing its cathedral to be only a little inferior to that of Seville, and delighted with "a correspondence, all original and amatory, between Lucretia Borgia and Cardinal Bembo." He

¹ This only appeared in 1831, but Campbell claims to have given Byron in conversation the suggestion of the subject.

secured a lock of the golden hair of the Pope's daughter, and wished himself a cardinal.

At Verona, Byron dilates on the amphitheatre, as surpassing anything he had seen even in Greece, and on the faith of the people in the story of Juliet, from whose reputed tomb he sent some pieces of granite to Ada and his nieces. In November we find him settled in Venice, "the greenest isle of his imagination." There he began to form those questionable alliances which are so marked a feature of his life, and so frequent a theme in his letters, that it is impossible to pass them without notice. The first of his temporary idols was Mariana Segati, "the wife of a merchant of Venice," for some time his landlord. With this woman, whom he describes as an antelope with oriental eyes, wavy hair, a voice like the cooing of a dove, and the spirit of a Bacchante, he remained on terms of intimacy for about eighteen months, during which their mutual devotion was only disturbed by some outbursts of jealousy. In December the poet took lessons in Armenian, glad to find in the study something craggy to break his mind upon. He translated into that language a portion of St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians. Notes on the carnival, praises of *Christabel*, instructions about the printing of *Childe Harold* (iii.), protests against the publication under his name of some spurious "domestic poems," and constant references, doubtfully domestic, to his Adriatic lady, fill up the records of 1816. On February 15, 1817, he announces to Murray the completion of the first sketch of *Manfred*, and alludes to it in a bantering manner as "a kind of poem in dialogue, of a wild metaphysical and inexplicable kind;" concluding, "I have at least rendered it *quite impossible* for the

stage, for which my intercourse with Drury Lane has given me the greatest contempt."

About this time Byron seems to have entertained the idea of returning to England in the spring, i. e. after a year's absence. This design, however, was soon set aside, partly in consequence of a slow malarian fever, by which he was prostrated for several weeks. On his partial recovery, attributed to his having had neither medicine nor doctor, and a determination to live till he had "put one or two people out of the world," he started on an expedition to Rome.

His first stage was Arqua; then Ferrara, where he was inspired, by a sight of the Italian poet's prison, with the *Lament of Tasso*; the next, Florence, where he describes himself as drunk with the beauty of the galleries. Among the pictures, he was most impressed with the mistresses of Raphael and Titian, to whom, along with Giorgione, he is always reverential; and he recognized in Santa Croce the Westminster Abbey of Italy. Passing through Foligno, he reached his destination early in May, and met his old friends, Lord Lansdowne and Hobhouse. The poet employed his short time at Rome in visiting on horseback the most famous sites in the city and neighbourhood—as the Alban Mount, Tivoli, Frascati, the Falls of Terni, and the Clitumnus—re-casting the crude first draft of the third act of *Manfred*, and sitting for his bust to Thorvaldsen. Of this sitting the sculptor afterwards gave some account to his compatriot, Hans Andersen: "Byron placed himself opposite to me, but at once began to put on a quite different expression from that usual to him. 'Will you not sit still?' said I. 'You need not assume that look.' 'That is my expression,' said Byron. 'Indeed,' said I; and I then

represented him as I wished. When the bust was finished he said, 'It is not at all like me; my expression is more unhappy.'" West, the American, who five years later painted his lordship at Leghorn, substantiates the above half-satirical anecdote, by the remark, "He was a bad sitter; he assumed a countenance that did not belong to him, as though he were thinking of a frontispiece for *Childe Harold*." Thorwaldsen's bust, the first cast of which was sent to Hobhouse, and pronounced by Mrs. Leigh to be the best of the numerous likenesses of her brother, was often repeated. Professor Brandes, of Copenhagen, introduces his striking sketch of the poet by a reference to the model, that has its natural place in the museum named from the great sculptor whose genius had flung into the clay the features of a character so unlike his own. The bust, says the Danish critic, at first sight impresses one with an undefinable classic grace; on closer examination the restlessness of a life is reflected in a brow over which clouds seem to hover, but clouds from which we look for lightnings. The dominant impression of the whole is that of some irresistible power (*Unwiderstehlichkeit*). Thorwaldsen, at a much later date (1829—1833) executed the marble statue, first intended for the Abbey, which is now to be seen in the library of Trinity College, in evidence that Cambridge is still proud of her most brilliant son.

Towards the close of the month—after almost fainting at the execution by guillotine of three bandits—he professes impatience to get back to Mariana, and early in the next we find him established with her near Venice, at the villa of La Mira, where for some time he continued to reside. His letters of June refer to the sale of Newstead, the mistake of Mrs. Leigh and others in

attributing to him the *Tales of a Landlord*, the appearance of *Lalla Rookh*, preparations for *Marino Faliero*, and the progress of *Childe Harold* iv. This poem, completed in September, and published early in 1818 (with a dedication to Hobhouse, who had supplied most of the illustrative notes), first made manifest the range of the poet's power. Only another slope of ascent lay between him and the pinnacle, over which shines the red star of *Cain*. Had Lord Byron's public career closed when he left England, he would have been remembered for a generation as the author of some musical minor verses, a clever satire, a journal in verse exhibiting flashes of genius, and a series of fascinating romances—also giving promise of higher power—which had enjoyed a marvellous popularity. The third and fourth cantos of *Childe Harold* placed him on another platform, that of the *Dii Majores* of English verse. These cantos are separated from their predecessors, not by a stage, but by a gulf. Previous to their publication he had only shown how far the force of rhapsody could go; now he struck with his right hand, and from the shoulder. Knowledge of life and study of Nature were the mainsprings of a growth which the indirect influence of Wordsworth, and the happy companionship of Shelley, played their part in fostering. Faultlessness is seldom a characteristic of impetuous verse, never of Byron's; and even in the later parts of the *Childe* there are careless lines, and doubtful images. "Self-exiled Harold wanders forth again," looking "pale and interesting;" but we are soon refreshed by a higher note. No familiarity can detract from "Waterloo," which holds its own by Barbour's "Bannockburn," and Scott's "Flodden." Sir Walter, referring to the climax of the opening, and the pathetic

lament of the closing lines, generously doubts whether any verses in English surpass them in vigour. There follows "The Broken Mirror," extolled by Jeffrey with an appreciation of its exuberance of fancy, and negligence of diction; and then the masterly sketch of Napoleon, with the implied reference to the writer at the end.

The descriptions in both cantos perpetually rise from a basis of rhetoric to a real height of poetry. Byron's "Rhine" flows, like the river itself, in a stream of "exulting and abounding" stanzas. His "Venice" may be set beside the masterpieces of Ruskin's prose. They are together the joint pride of Italy and England. The tempest in the third canto is in verse a splendid microcosm of the favourite, if not the prevailing mood, of the writer's mind. In spite of manifest flaws, the nine stanzas beginning "It is the hush of night," have enough in them to feed a high reputation. The poet's dying day, his sun and moon contending over the Rhoetian hill, his Thrasymane, Clitumnus, and Velino, show that his eye has grown keener, and his imagery at least more terse, and that he can occasionally forget himself in his surroundings. The Drachenfels, Ehrenbreitstein, the Alps, Lake Leman, pass before us like a series of dissolving views. But the stability of the book depends on its being a Temple of Fame, as well as a Diorama of Scenery. It is no mere versified Guide, because every resting-place in the pilgrimage is made interesting by association with illustrious memories. Coblenz introduces the tribute to Marceau; Clarens an almost complete review, in five verses, of Rousseau; Lausanne and Ferney the quintessence of criticism on Gibbon and Voltaire. A tomb in Arquà suggests Petrarch; the grass-grown streets of Ferrara lead in the lines on Tasso; the white

walls of the Etrurian Athens bring back Alfieri and Michael Angelo, and the prose bard of the hundred tales, and Dante, "buried by the upbraiding shore," and—

The starry Galileo and his woes.

Byron has made himself so master of the glories and the wrecks of Rome, that almost everything else that has been said of them seems superfluous. Hawthorne, in his *Marble Faun*, comes nearest to him; but Byron's Gladiator and Apollo, if not his Laocoon, are unequalled. "The voice of Marius," says Scott, "could not sound more deep and solemn among the ruins of Carthage, than the strains of the pilgrim among the broken shrines and fallen statues of her subduer." As the third canto has a fitting close with the poet's pathetic remembrance of his daughter, so the fourth is wound up with consummate art,—the memorable dirge on the Princess Charlotte being followed by the address to the sea, which, enduring unwrinkled through all its ebbs and flows, seems to mock at the mutability of human life.

Manfred, his witch drama, as the author called it, has had a special attraction for inquisitive biographers, because it has been supposed in some dark manner to reveal the secrets of his prison house. Its lines have been tortured, like the witches of the seventeenth century, to extort from them the meaning of the "all nameless hour," and every conceivable horror has been alleged as its *motif*. On this subject Goethe writes with a humorous simplicity: "This singularly intellectual poet has extracted from my *Faust* the strongest nourishment for his hypochondria; but he has made use of the impelling principles for his own purposes. . . . When a bold and enterprising young man, he won the affections of a

Florentine lady. Her husband discovered the amour, and murdered his wife; but the murderer was the same night found dead in the street, and there was no one to whom any suspicion could be attached. Lord Byron removed from Florence, but these spirits have haunted him all his life. This romantic incident explains innumerable allusions," e. g.,—

I have shed
Blood, but not hers,—and yet her blood was shed.

Were it not for the fact that the poet had never seen the city in question when he wrote the poem, this explanation would be more plausible than most others, for the allusions are all to some lady who has been done to death. Galt asserts that the plot turns on a tradition of unhallowed necromancy—a human sacrifice, like that of Antinous attributed to Hadrian. Byron himself says it has no plot, but he kept teasing his questioners with mysterious hints, e. g. "It was the Staubbach and the Jungfrau, and something else more than Faustus, which made me write *Manfred*;" and of one of his critics he says to Murray, "It had a better origin than he can devise or divine, for the soul of him." In any case most methods of reading between its lines would, if similarly applied, convict Sophocles, Schiller, and Shelley of incest, Shakespeare of murder, Milton of blasphemy, Scott of forgery, Marlowe and Goethe of compacts with the devil. Byron was no dramatist, but he had wit enough to vary at least the circumstances of his projected personality. The memories of both Fausts—the Elizabethan and the German—mingle, in the pages of this piece, with shadows of the author's life; but to these it never gives, nor could be intended to give, any substantial form.

Manfred is a chaos of pictures, suggested by the

scenery of Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald, half animated by vague personifications and sensational narrative. Like *Harold*, and Scott's *Marmion*, it just misses being a great poem. The Coliseum is its masterpiece of description, the appeal, "Astarte, my beloved, speak to me," its nearest approach to pathos. The lonely death of the hero makes an effective close to the moral tumult of the preceding scenes. But the reflections, often striking, are seldom absolutely fresh : that beginning,

The mind, which is immortal, makes itself
Requital for its good or evil thoughts,
Is its own origin of ill and end,
And its own place and time,

is transplanted from Milton with as little change as Milton made in transplanting it from Marlowe. The author's own favourite passage, the invocation to the sun (act iii., sc. 2), has some sublimity, marred by lapses. The lyrics scattered through the poem sometimes open well, e. g.,—

Mont Blanc is the monarch of mountains;
They crowned him long ago,
On a throne of rocks, in a robe of clouds,
With a diadem of snow;

but they cannot sustain themselves like true song-birds, and fall to the ground like spent rockets. This applies to Byron's lyrics generally; turn to the incantation in the *Deformed Transformed*: the first line and a half are in tune,—

Beautiful shadow of Thetis's boy,
Who sleeps in the meadow whose grass grows o'er Troy.

Nor Sternhold nor Hopkins has more ruthlessly outraged our ears than the next two—

From the red earth, like Adam, thy likeness I shape,
As the Being who made him, whose actions I ape (!)

Of his songs : " There be none of Beauty's daughters," " She walks in beauty," " Maid of Athens," " I enter thy garden of roses," the translation " Sons of the Greeks," and others, have a flow and verve that it is pedantry to ignore ; but in general Byron was too much of the earth earthy to be a great lyrist. Some of the greatest have lived wild lives, but their wings were not weighted with the lead of the love of the world.

The summer and early months of the autumn of 1817 were spent at La Mira, and much of the poet's time was occupied in riding along the banks of the Brenta, often in the company of the few congenial Englishmen who came in his way ; others, whom he avoided, avenged themselves by retailing stories, none of which were " too improbable for the craving appetites of their slander-loving countrymen." In August he received a visit from Mr. Hobhouse, and on this occasion drew up the remarkable document afterwards given to Mr. M. G. Lewis for circulation in England, which appeared in the *Academy* of October 9th, 1869. In this document he says, " It has been intimated to me that the persons understood to be the legal advisers of Lady Byron have declared their lips to be sealed up on the cause of the separation between her and myself. If their lips are sealed up they are not sealed up by me, and the greatest favour they can confer upon me will be to open them." He goes on to state, that he repents having consented to the separation—will be glad to cancel the deed, or to go before any tribunal, to discuss the matter in the most public manner ; adding, that Mr. Hobhouse (in whose presence he was writing) proposed, on his part, to go into court, and

ending with a renewed asseveration of his ignorance of the allegations against him, and his inability to understand for what purpose they had been kept back, "unless it was to sanction the most infamous calumnies by silence." Hobhouse, and others, during the four succeeding years, ineffectually endeavoured to persuade the poet to return to England. Moore and others insist that Byron's heart was at home when his presence was abroad, and that, with all her faults, he loved his country still. Leigh Hunt, on the contrary, asserts that he cared nothing for England or its affairs. Like many men of genius, Byron was never satisfied with what he had at the time. "*Romæ Tibur amem ventosus Tibure Romam.*" At Seaham he is bored to death, and pants for the excitement of the clubs; in London society he longs for a desert or island in the Cyclades; after their separation, he begins to regret his wife; after his exile, his country. "Where," he exclaimed to Hobhouse, "is real comfort to be found out of England?" He frequently fell into the mood in which he wrote the verse,—

Yet I was born where men are proud to be,
Not without cause: and should I leave behind
Th' immortal island of the sage and free,
And seek me out a home by a remoter sea?

But the following, to Murray (June 7, 1819), is equally sincere. "Some of the epitaphs at Ferrara pleased me more than the more splendid monuments of Bologna; for instance—

'Martini Luigi
Implora pace.'
'Lucrezia Picini
Implora eterna quiete.

Can anything be more full of pathos? These few words say all that can be said or sought; the dead had had enough of life; all they wanted was rest, and this they implore. There is all the helplessness, and humble hope, and death-like prayer that can arise from the grave—‘implora pace.’ I hope, whoever may survive me, and shall see me put in the foreigner’s burying-ground at the Lido, within the fortress by the Adriatic, will see these two words, and no more, put over me. I trust they won’t think of pickling and bringing me home to Clod, or Blunderbuss Hall. I am sure my bones would not rest in an English grave, or my clay mix with the earth of that country.” Hunt’s view is, in this as in other subtle respects, nearer the truth than Moore’s; for with all Byron’s insight into Italian vice, he hated more the master vice of England—hypocrisy; and much of his greatest, and in a sense latest, because unfinished work, is the severest, as it might be the wholesomest, satire ever directed against a great nation since the days of Juvenal and Tacitus.

In September (1817) Byron entered into negotiations, afterwards completed, for renting a country house among the Euganean hills near Este, from Mr. Hoppner, the English Consul at Venice, who bears frequent testimony to his kindness and courtesy. In October we find him settled for the winter in Venice, where he first occupied his old quarters, in the Speziera, and afterwards hired one of the palaces of the Countess Mocenigo on the Grand Canal. Between this mansion, the cottage at Este, and the villa of La Mira, he divided his time for the next two years. During the earlier part of his Venetian career he had continued to frequent the salon of the Countess Albrizzi, where he met with people of both sexes of

some rank and standing who appreciated his genius, though some among them fell into absurd mistakes. A gentleman of the company informing the hostess, in answer to some inquiry regarding Canova's busts, that Washington, the American President, was shot in a duel by Burke, "What, in the name of folly, are you thinking of?" said Byron, perceiving that the speaker was confounding Washington with Hamilton, and Burke with Burr. He afterwards transferred himself to the rival coterie of the Countess Benzoni, and gave himself up with little reserve to the intrigues which cast discredit on this portion of his life. Nothing is so conducive to dissipation as despair, and Byron had begun to regard the Sea-Cybele as a Sea-Sodom—when he wrote, "To watch a city die daily, as she does, is a sad contemplation. I sought to distract my mind from a sense of her desolation and my own solitude, by plunging into a vortex that was anything but pleasure." In any case, he forsook the "Dame," and, by what his biographer calls a "descent in the scale of refinement, for which nothing but the wayward state of his mind can account," sought the companions of his leisure hours among the wearers of the "fazzioli." The carnivals of the years 1818, 1819, mark the height of his excesses. Early in the former, Mariana Segati fell out of favour, owing to Byron's having detected her in selling the jewels he had given as presents, and so being led to suspect a large mercenary element in her devotion. To her succeeded Margarita Cogni, the wife of a baker who proved as accommodating as his predecessor, the linen-draper. This woman was decidedly a character, and Señor Castelar has almost elevated her into a heroine. A handsome virago, with brown shoulders, and black hair, endowed with the

strength of an Amazon, "a face like Faustina's, and the figure of a Juno—tall and energetic as a pythoness," she quartered herself for twelve months in the palace as "Donna di governo," and drove the servants about without let or hindrance. Unable to read or write she intercepted his lordship's letters to little purpose; but she had great natural business talents, reduced by one half the expenses of his household, kept everything in good order, and, when her violences roused his wrath, turned it off with some ready retort or witticism. She was very devout, and would cross herself three times at the Angelus. One instance, of a different kind of devotion, from Byron's own account, is sufficiently graphic:—"In the autumn one day, going to the Lido with my gondoliers, we were overtaken by a heavy squall, and the gondola put in peril, hats blown away, boat filling, oar lost, tumbling sea, thunder, rain in torrents, and wind unceasing. On our return, after a tight struggle, I found her on the open steps of the Mocenigo Palace on the Grand Canal, with her great black eyes flashing through her tears, and the long dark hair which was streaming, drenched with rain, over her brows. She was perfectly exposed to the storm; and the wind blowing her dress about her thin figure, and the lightning flashing round her, made her look like Medea alighted from her chariot, or the Sibyl of the tempest that was rolling around her, the only living thing within hail at that moment, except ourselves. On seeing me safe she did not wait to greet me, as might have been expected; but, calling out to me, 'Ah! can' della Madonna, xe esto il tempo per andar' al' Lido,' ran into the house, and solaced herself with scolding the boatmen for not foreseeing the 'temporale.' Her joy at seeing me again was

moderately mixed with ferocity, and gave me the idea of a tigress over her recovered cuba."

Some months after she became ungovernable—threw plates about, and snatched caps from the heads of other women who looked at her lord in public places. Byron told her she must go home; whereupon she proceeded to break glass, and threaten "knives, poison, fire;" and on his calling his boatmen to get ready the gondola, threw herself in the dark night into the canal. She was rescued, and in a few days finally dismissed; after which he saw her only twice, at the theatre. Her whole picture is more like that of Théroigne de Méricourt than that of Raphael's Fornarina, whose name she received.

Other stories, of course, gathered round this strange life—personal encounters, aquatic feats, and all manner of romantic and impossible episodes; their basis being, that Byron on one occasion thrashed, on another challenged, a man who tried to cheat him, was a frequent rider, and a constant swimmer, so that he came to be called "the English fish," "water-spaniel." "sea-devil," &c. One of the boatmen is reported to have said, "He is a good gondolier, spoilt by being a poet and a lord;" and in answer to a traveller's inquiry, "Where does he get his poetry?" "He dives for it." His habits, as regards eating, seem to have been generally abstemious; but he drank a pint of gin and water over his verses at night, and then took claret and soda in the morning.

Riotous living may have helped to curtail Byron's life, but it does not seem to have seriously impaired his powers. Among these adverse surroundings of the "court of Circe," he threw off *Beppo*, *Mazeppa*, and the early books of *Don Juan*. The first canto of the last was

written in November, 1818, the second in January, 1819, the third and fourth towards the close of the same year. *Beppo*, its brilliant prelude, sparkles like a draught of champagne. This "Venetian story," or sketch, in which the author broke ground on his true satiric field—the satire of social life—and first adopted the measure avowedly suggested by *Whistlecraft* (Frere), was drafted in October, 1817, and appeared in May, 1818. It aims at comparatively little, but is perfectly successful in its aim, and unsurpassed for the incisiveness of its side strokes, and the courtly ease of a manner that never degenerates into mannerism. In *Mazeppa* the poet reverts to his earlier style, and that of Scott; the description of the headlong ride hurries us along with a breathless expectancy that gives it a conspicuous place among his minor efforts. The passage about the howling of the wolves, and the fever faint of the victim, is as graphic as anything in Burns—

The skies spun like a mighty wheel,
I saw the trees like drunkards reel.

In the May or June of 1818 Byron's little daughter, Allegra, had been sent from England, under the care of a Swiss nurse too young to undertake her management in such trying circumstances, and after four months of anxiety he placed her in charge of Mrs. Hoppner. In the course of this and the next year there are frequent allusions to the child, all, save one which records a mere affectation of indifference, full of affectionate solicitude. In June, 1819, he writes, "Her temper and her ways, Mr. Hoppner says, are like mine, as well as her features; she will make, in that case, a manageable young lady." Later he talks of her as "flourishing like a pomegranate blossom." In March, 1820, we have

another reference. "Allegra is prettier, I think, but as obstinate as a mule, and as ravenous as a vulture ; health good, to judge by the complexion, temper tolerable, but for vanity and pertinacity. She thinks herself handsome, and will do as she pleases." In May he refers to having received a letter from her mother, but gives no details. In the following year, with the approval of the Shelleys then at Pisa, he placed her for education in the convent of Cavalli Bagni in the Romagna. "I have," he writes to Hoppner, who had thought of having her boarded in Switzerland, "neither spared care, kindness, nor expense, since the child was sent to me. The people may say what they please. I must content myself with not deserving, in this instance, that they should speak ill. The place is a *country* town, in a good air, and less liable to objections of every kind. It has always appeared to me that the moral defect in Italy does *not* proceed from a *conventual* education ; because, to my certain knowledge, they come out of their convents innocent, even to ignorance of moral evil ; but to the state of society into which they are directly plunged on coming out of it. It is like educating an infant on a mountain top, and then taking him to the sea, and throwing him into it, and desiring him to swim." Elsewhere he says, "I by no means intend to give a natural child an English education, because, with the disadvantages of her birth, her after settlement would be doubly difficult. Abroad, with a fair foreign education, and a portion of 5000*l.* or 6000*l.* (his will leaving her 5000*l.*, on condition that she should not marry an Englishman, is here explained and justified), she might, and may, marry very respectably. In England such a dowry would be a pittance, while elsewhere it is a fortune. It is, besides, my wish that

she should be a Roman Catholic, which I look upon as the best religion, as it is assuredly the oldest of the various branches of Christianity." It only remains to add that, when he heard that the child had fallen ill of fever in 1822, Byron was almost speechless with agitation, and, on the news of her death, which took place April 22nd, he seemed at first utterly prostrated. Next day he said, "Allegra is dead ; she is more fortunate than we. It is God's will, let us mention it no more." Her remains rest beneath the elm-tree at Harrow which her father used to haunt in boyhood, with the date of birth and death, and the scripture—

I shall go to her, but she shall not return to me.

The most interesting of the visits paid to Byron during the period of his life at Venice was that of Shelley, who, leaving his wife and children at Bagni di Lucca, came to see him in August, 1818. He arrived late, in the midst of a thunder-storm ; and next day they sailed to the Lido, and rode together along the sands. The attitude of the two poets towards each other is curious ; the comparatively shrewd man of the world often relied on the idealist for guidance and help in practical matters, admired his courage and independence, spoke of him invariably as the best of men, but never paid a sufficiently warm tribute in public to his work. Shelley, on the other hand, certainly the most modest of great poets, contemplates Byron in the fixed attitude of a literary worshipper.

The introduction to *Julian and Maddalo*, directly suggested by this visit, under the slight veil of a change in the name, gives a summary of the view of his friend's character which he continued to entertain. "He is a person of the most consummate genius, and capable if he

would direct his energies to such an end, of becoming the redeemer of his degraded country. But it is his weakness to be proud ; he derives, from a comparison of his own extraordinary mind with the dwarfish intellects that surround him, an intense apprehension of the nothingness of human life. His passions and his powers are incomparably greater than those of other men ; and instead of the latter having been employed in curbing the former, they have mutually lent each other strength ;" but "in social life no human being can be more gentle, patient, and unassuming. He is cheerful, frank, and witty. His more serious conversation is a sort of intoxication ; men are held by it as by a spell."

Subsequently to this visit Byron lent the villa at Este to his friend, and during the autumn weeks of their residence there were written the lines among the Euganean hills, where, in the same strain of reverence, Shelley refers to the "tempest-cleaving swan of Albion," to the "music flung o'er a mighty thunder-fit," and to the sun-like soul destined to immortalize his ocean refuge,—

As the ghost of Homer clings
Round Scamander's wasting springs,
As divinest Shakespeare's might
Fills Avon and the world with light.

"The sun," he says, at a later date, "has extinguished the glowworm ;" and again, "I despair of rivalling Lord Byron, as well I may ; and there is no other with whom it is worth contending."

Shelley was, in the main, not only an exquisite but a trustworthy critic ; and no man was more absolutely above being influenced by the fanfaronade of rank or the din of popularity. These criticisms are therefore not to be lightly set aside, nor are they unintelligible. Perhaps

those admirers of the clearer and more consistent nature, who exalt him to the rank of a greater poet, are misled by the amiable love of one of the purest characters in the history of our literature. There is at least no difficulty in understanding why he should have been, as it were, concussed by Byron's greater massiveness and energy into a sense—easy to an impassioned devotee—of inferiority. Similarly, most of the estimates—many already reversed, others reversible—by the men of that age, of each other, can be explained. We can see how it was that Shelley overestimated both the character and the powers of Hunt ; and Byron depreciated Keats, and was ultimately repelled by Wordsworth, and held out his hand to meet the manly grasp of Scott. The one enigma of their criticism is the respect that they joined in paying to the witty, genial, shallow, worldly, musical Tom Moore.

This favourite of fortune and the minor muses, in the course of a short tour through the north of Italy in the autumn of 1819, found his noble friend on the 8th of October at La Mira, went with him on a sight-seeing expedition to Venice, and passed five or six days in his company. Of this visit he has recorded his impressions, some of which relate to his host's personal appearance, others to his habits and leading incidents of his life. Byron "had grown fatter, both in person and face, and the latter had suffered most by the change, having lost by the enlargement of the features some of that refined and spiritualized look that had in other times distinguished it, but although less romantic he appeared more humorous." They renewed their recollections of the old days and nights in London, and compared them with later experiences of Bores and Blues, in a manner which threatened to put to flight the historical and poetical

associations naturally awakened by the City of the Sea Byron had a rooted dislike to any approach to fine talk in the ordinary intercourse of life ; and when his companion began to rhapsodize on the rosy hue of the Italian sunsets, he interrupted him with, "Come, d—n it, Tom, *don't* be poetical." He insisted on Moore, who sighed after what he imagined would be the greater comforts of an hotel, taking up his quarters in his palace ; and as they were groping their way through the somewhat dingy entrance, cried out, "Keep clear of the dog !" and a few paces farther, "Take care, or the monkey will fly at you !" an incident recalling the old vagaries of the menagerie at Newstead. The biographer's reminiscences mainly dwell on his lordship's changing moods and tempers and gymnastic exercises, his terror of interviewing strangers, his imperfect appreciation of art, his preference of fish to flesh, his almost parsimonious economy in small matters, mingled with allusions to his domestic calamities, and frequent expressions of a growing distaste to Venetian society. On leaving the city, Moore passed a second afternoon at La Mira, had a glimpse of Allegra, and the first intimation of the existence of the notorious Memoirs. "A short time after dinner Byron left the room, and returned carrying in his hand a white leather bag. 'Look here,' he said, holding it up ; 'this would be worth something to Murray, though *you*, I dare say, would not give sixpence for it.' 'What is it?' I asked. 'My life and adventures,' he answered. 'It is not a thing,' he answered, 'that can be published during my lifetime, but you may have it if you like. There, do whatever you please with it.' In taking the bag, and thanking him most warmly, I added, 'This will make a nice legacy for my little Tom, who shall astonish the latter days of

the nineteenth century with it.'"¹ Shortly after, Moore for the last time bade his friend farewell, taking with him from Madame Guiccioli, who did the honours of the house, an introduction to her brother, Count Gamba, at Rome. "Theresa Guiccioli," says Castelar, "appears like a star on the stormy horizon of the poet's life." A young Romagnese, the daughter of a nobleman of Ravenna, of good descent but limited means, she had been educated in a convent, and married in her nineteenth year to a rich widower of sixty, in early life a friend of Alfieri, and noted as the patron of the National Theatre. This beautiful blonde, of pleasing manners, graceful presence, and a strong vein of sentiment, fostered by the reading of Chateaubriand, met Byron for the first time casually when she came in her bridal dress to one of the Albrizzi reunions; but she was only introduced to him early in the April of the following year, at the house of the Countess Benzoni. "Suddenly the young Italian found herself inspired with a passion of which till that moment her mind could not have formed the least idea; she had thought of love but as an amusement, and now became its slave." Byron, on the other hand, gave what remained of a heart, never alienated from her by any other mistress. Till the middle of the month they met every day; and when the husband took her back to Ravenna she des-

¹ In December, 1820, Byron sent several more sheets of memoranda from Ravenna, and in the following year suggested an arrangement by which Murray paid over to Moore, who was then in difficulties, 2000*l.* for the right of publishing the whole, under the condition, among others, that Lady Byron should see them, and have the right of reply to anything that might seem to her objectionable. She on her part declined to have anything to do with them. When the Memoirs were destroyed, Moore paid back the 2000*l.*, but obtained four thousand guineas for editing the *Life and Correspondence*.

patched to her idol a series of impassioned letters, declaring her resolution to mould her life in accordance with his wishes. Towards the end of May she had prepared her relatives to receive Byron as a visitor. He started in answer to the summons, writing on his way the beautiful stanzas to the Po, beginning—

River that rollest by the ancient walls
Where dwells the lady of my love.

Again passing through Ferrara, and visiting Bologna, he left the latter on the 8th, and on his arrival at his destination found the Countess dangerously ill; but his presence, and the attentions of the famous Venetian doctor, Aglietti, who was sent for by his advice, restored her. The Count seems to have been proud of his guest. "I can't make him out at all," Byron writes; "he visits me frequently, and takes me out (like Whittington the Lord Mayor) in a coach and six horses. The fact appears to be, that he is completely governed by her—and, for that matter, so am I." Later he speaks of having got his horses from Venice, and riding or driving daily in the scenery reproduced in the third canto of *Don Juan*:—

Sweet hour of twilight! in the solitude
Of the pine forest, and the silent shore
Which bounds Ravenna's immemorial wood.

On Theresa's recovery, in dread of a possible separation he proposed to fly with her to America, to the Alps, to "some unsuspected isle in the far seas;" and she suggested the idea of feigning death, like Juliet, and rising from the tomb. Neither expedient was called for. When the Count went to Bologna, in August, with his wife, Lord Byron was allowed to follow; and—after consoling himself during an excursion which the married pair made

to their estate, by hovering about her empty rooms and writing in her books—he established himself, on the Count's return to his headquarters, with her and Allegra at Bologna. Meanwhile, Byron had written *The Prophecy of Dante*, and in August the prose letter, *To the Editor of the British Review*, on the charge of bribery in *Don Juan*. Than this inimitable epistle no more laughter-compelling composition exists. About the same time, we hear of his leaving the theatre in a convulsion of tears, occasioned by the representation of Alfieri's *Mirra*.

He left Bologna with the Countess on the 15th of September, when they visited the Euganean hills and Arquà, and wrote their names together in the Pilgrim's Book. On arriving at Venice, the physicians recommending Madame Guiccioli to country air, they settled, still by her husband's consent, for the autumn at La Mira, where Moore and others found them domesticated. At the beginning of November the poet was prostrated by an attack of tertian fever. In some of his hours of delirium he dictated to his careful nurses, Fletcher and the Countess, a number of verses, which she assures us were correct and sensible. He attributes his restoration to cold water and the absence of doctors; but, ere his complete recovery, Count Guiccioli had suddenly appeared on the scene, and run away with his own wife. The lovers had for a time not only to acquiesce in the separation, but to agree to cease their correspondence. In December, Byron in a fit of spleen had packed up his belongings, with a view to return to England. "He was," we are told, "ready dressed for the journey, his boxes on board the gondola, his gloves and cap on, and even his little cane in his hand, when my lord declares that if it should strike one—which it did—before everything was

in order, he would not go that day. It is evident he had not the heart to go." Next day he heard that Madame Guiccioli was again seriously ill, received and accepted the renewed invitation which bound him to her and to the south. He left Venice for the last time almost by stealth, rushed along the familiar roads, and was welcomed at Ravenna.

CHAPTER VIII.

1820—1821.

RAVENNA—DRAMAS—CAIN—VISION OF JUDGMENT.

BYRON's life at Ravenna was during the first months comparatively calm ; nevertheless, he mingled in society, took part in the Carnival, and was received at the parties of the Legate. "I may stay," he writes in January, 1820, "a day—a week—a year—all my life." Meanwhile, he imported his movables from Venice, hired a suite of rooms in the Guiccioli palace, executed his marvellously close translation of Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*, wrote his version of the story of *Francesca of Rimini*, and received visits from his old friend Banks and from Sir Humphrey Davy. At this time he was accustomed to ride about armed to the teeth, apprehending a possible attack from assassins on the part of Count Guiccioli. In April his letters refer to the insurrectionary movements then beginning against the Holy Alliance. "We are on the verge of a row here. Last night they have over-written all the city walls with 'Up with the Republic!' and 'Death to the Pope!' The police have been searching for the subscribers, but have caught none as yet. The other day they confiscated the whole translation of the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, and have prosecuted the translator." In July a Papal decree of separation between

the Countess and her husband was obtained, on condition of the latter paying from his large income a pittance to the lady of 200*l.* a year, and her undertaking to live in her father's house—an engagement which was, first in the spirit, and subsequently in the letter, violated. For a time, however, she retired to a villa about fifteen miles from Ravenna, where she was visited by Byron at comparatively rare intervals. By the end of July he had finished *Marino Faliero*, and ere the close of the year the fifth canto of *Don Juan*. In September he says to Murray, "I am in a fierce humour at not having Scott's *Monastery*. No more Keats,¹ I entreat. There is no bearing the drivelling idiotism of the manikin. I don't feel inclined to care further about *Don Juan*. What do you think a very pretty Italian lady said to me the other day, when I remarked that 'it would live longer than *Childe Harold*'? 'Ah! but I would rather have the fame of *Childe Harold* for three years than an immortality of *D. J.*'" This is to-day the common female judgment; it is known to have been La Guiccioli's, as well as Mrs. Leigh's, and by their joint persuasion Byron was for a season induced to lay aside "that horrid, wearisome Don." About this time he wrote the memorable reply to the remarks on that poem in *Blackwood's Magazine*, where he enters on a defence of his life, attacks the Lakers, and champions Pope against the new school of poetry, lamenting that his own practice did not square with his precept;

¹ In a note on a similar passage, bearing the date November 12, 1821, he, however, confesses:—"My indignation at Mr. Keats' depreciation of Pope has hardly permitted me to do justice to his own genius, which malgré all the fantastic fopperies of his style was undoubtedly of great promise. His fragment of *Hyperion* seems actually inspired by the Titans, and is as sublime as *Æschylus*. He is a loss to our literature."

and adding, "We are all wrong, except Rogers, Crabbe, and Campbell."

In November he refers to reports of his letters being opened by the Austrian officials, and the unpleasant things the Huns, as he calls them, are likely to find therein. Early in the next month he tells Moore that the commandant of their troops, a brave officer, but obnoxious to the people, had been found lying at his door, with five slugs in him, and, bleeding inwardly, had died in the palace, where he had been brought to be nursed.

This incident is versified in *Don Juan*, v. 33—39, with anatomical minuteness of detail. After trying in vain to wrench an answer out of death, the poet ends in his accustomed strain—

But it was all a mystery. Here we are,
And there we go:—but *where*? Five bits of lead—
Or three, or two, or one—send very far!

Assassination has sometimes been the prelude to revolution, but it may be questioned if it has ever promoted the cause of liberty. Most frequently it has served as a pretext for reaction, or a red signal. In this instance—as afterwards in 1848—overt acts of violence made the powers of despotism more alert, and conduced with the half-hearted action of their adversaries to the suppression of the rising of 1820-21. Byron's sympathy with the movement seems to have been stimulated by his new associations. Theresa's brother, Count Pietro, an enthusiastic young soldier, having returned from Rome and Naples, surmounting a prejudice not wholly unnatural, became attached to him, and they entered into a partnership in behalf of what—adopting a phrase often flaunted in opposite camps—they called constitutional principles. Finally the poet so committed himself to the party of

insurrection that, though his nationality secured him from direct attack, his movements were necessarily affected by the fiasco. In July the Gambas were banished from the Romagna, Pietro being actually carried by force over the frontier; and, according to the articles of her separation, the Countess had to follow them to Florence. Byron lingered for some months, partly from a spirit of defiance, and partly from his affection towards a place where he had enlisted the regards of numerous beneficiaries. The Gambas were for some time bent on migrating to Switzerland; but the poet, after first acquiescing, subsequently conceived a violent repugnance to the idea, and early in August wrote to Shelley, earnestly requesting his presence, aid, and counsel. Shelley at once complied, and, entering into a correspondence with Madame Guiccioli, succeeded in inducing her relatives to abandon their transmontane plans, and agree to take up their headquarters at Pisa. This incident gave rise to a series of interesting letters, in which the younger poet gives a vivid and generous account of the surroundings and condition of his friend. On the 2nd of August he writes from Ravenna:—"I arrived last night at ten o'clock, and sat up talking with Lord B. till five this morning. He was delighted to see me. He has, in fact, completely recovered his health, and lives a life totally the reverse of that which he led at Venice. . . . Poor fellow! he is now quite well, and immersed in politics and literature. We talked a great deal of poetry and such matters last night, and, as usual, differed, I think, more than ever. He affects to patronize a system of criticism fit only for the production of mediocrity; and, although all his finer poems and passages have been produced in defiance of this system, yet I recognize the pernicious effects of it in

the *Doge of Venice*." Again, on the 15th: "Lord B. is greatly improved in every respect—in genius, in temper, in moral views, in health, and happiness. His connexion with La Guiccioli has been an inestimable benefit to him. He lives in considerable splendour, but within his income, which is now about 4000*l.* a year, 1000*l.* of which he devotes to purposes of charity. Switzerland is little fitted for him; the gossip and the cabals of those Anglicised coteries would torment him, as they did before. Ravenna is a miserable place. He would in every respect be better among the Tuscans. He has read to me one of the unpublished cantos of *Don Juan*. It sets him not only above, but far above, all the poets of the day. Every word has the stamp of immortality. . . . I have spoken to him of Hunt, but not with a direct view of demanding a contribution. I am sure, if I asked, it would not be refused; yet there is something in me that makes it impossible. Lord B. and I are excellent friends; and were I reduced to poverty, or were I a writer who had no claim to a higher position than I possess, I would freely ask him any favour. Such is not now the case." Later, after stating that Byron had decided upon Tuscany, he says, in reference to La Guiccioli, "At the conclusion of a letter, full of all the fine things she says she has heard of me, is this request, which I transcribe:—'Signore, la vostra bontà mi fa ardita di chiedervi un favore, me lo accordarete voi? *Non partite da Ravenna senza milord.*' Of course, being now by all the laws of knighthood captive to a lady's request, I shall only be at liberty on my parole until Lord Byron is settled at Pisa."

Shelley took his leave, after a visit of ten days' duration, about the 17th or 18th of April. In a letter, dated

August 26, he mentions having secured for his lordship the Palazzo Lanfranchi, an old spacious building on the Lung' Arno, once the family residence of the destroyers of Ugolino, and still said to be haunted by their ghosts. Towards the close of October, he says they have been expecting him any day these six weeks. Byron, however, did not leave till the morning of the 29th. On his road, there occurred at Imola the accidental meeting with Lord Clare. Clare—who on this occasion merely crossed his friend's path on his way to Rome—at a later date came on purpose from Geneva before returning to England to visit the poet, who, then at Leghorn, recorded in a letter to Moore his sense of this proof of old affection undecayed. At Bologna—his next stage—he met Rogers by appointment, and the latter has preserved his memory of the event in well-known lines. Together they revisited Florence and its galleries, where they were distracted by the crowds of sight-seeing visitors. Byron must have reached Pisa not later than the 2nd of November (1821), for his first letter from there bears the date of the 3rd.

The later months of the poet's life at Ravenna were marked by intense literary activity. Over a great part of the year was spread the controversy with Bowles about Pope, i.e. between the extremes of Art against Nature, and Nature against Art. It was a controversy for the most part free from personal animus, and on Byron's part the genuine expression of a reaction against a reaction. To this year belong the greater number of the poet's Historical Dramas. What was said of these at the time by Jeffrey, Heber, and others, was said with justice; it is seldom that the criticism of our day finds so little to reverse in that of sixty years ago.

The author, having shown himself capable of being

pathetic, sarcastic, sentimental, comical, and sublime, we would be tempted to think that he had written these plays to show, what no one before suspected, that he could also be dull, were it not for his own exorbitant estimation of them. Lord Byron had few of the powers of a great dramatist; he had little architectural imagination, or capacity to conceive and build up a whole. His works are mainly masses of fine, splendid, or humorous writing, heaped together; the parts are seldom forged into one, or connected by any indissoluble link. His so-called Dramas are only poems divided into chapters. Further, he had little of what Mr. Ruskin calls penetrative imagination. So it has been plausibly said that he made his men after his own image, his women after his own heart. The former are, indeed, rather types of what he wished to be than what he was. They are better, and worse, than himself. They have stronger wills, more definite purposes, but less genial and less versatile natures. But it remains true, that when he tried to represent a character totally different from himself, the result is either unreal or uninteresting. *Marino Faliero*, begun April, finished July, 1820, and prefixed by a humorous dedication to Goethe—which was, however, suppressed—was brought on the stage of Drury Lane Theatre early in 1821, badly mangled, appointed, and acted—and damned.

Byron seems to have been sincere in saying he did not intend any of his plays to be represented. We are more inclined to accuse him of self-deception when he asserts that he did not mean them to be popular; but he took sure means to prevent them from being so. *Marino Faliero*, in particular, was pronounced by Dr. John Watkins—old Grobius himself—"to be the dullest of dull plays;" and even the warmest admirers of the poet

had to confess that the style was cumbrous. The story may be true, but it is none the less unnatural. The characters are comparatively commonplace, the women especially being mere shadows; the motion is slow; and the inevitable passages of fine writing are, as the extolled soliloquy of Lioni, rather rhetorical than imaginative. The speeches of the Doge are solemn, but prolix, if not ostentatious, and—perhaps the vital defect—his cause fails to enlist our sympathies. Artistically, this play was Byron's most elaborate attempt to revive the unities and other restrictions of the severe style, which, when he wrote, had been "vanquished in literature." "I am persuaded," he writes in the preface, "that a great tragedy is not to be produced by following the old dramatists, who are full of faults, but by producing regular dramas like the Greeks." He forgets that the statement in the mouth of a Greek dramatist that his play was not intended for the stage, would have been a confession of failure; and that Aristotle had admitted that even the Deity could not make the Past present. The ethical motives of Faliero are, first, the cry for vengeance—the feeling of affronted or unsatiated pride—that runs through so much of the author's writing, and second, the enthusiasm for public ends, which was beginning to possess him. The following lines have been pointed out as embodying some of Byron's spirit of protest against the mere selfish "greasy domesticity" of the Georgian era:—

I. BER.

Such ties are not

For those who are called to the high destinies
Which purify corrupted commonwealths :
We must forget all feelings save the one,
We must resign all passions save our purpose,
We must behold no object save our country,
And only look on death as beautiful

So that the sacrifice ascend to heaven,
And draw down freedom on her evermore.

CAL. But if we fail—?

I. BER They never fail who die
In a great cause : the block may soak their gore ;
Their heads may sodden in the sun ; their limbs
Be strung to city gates and castle walls,
But still their spirit walks abroad.

—a passage which, after his wont, he spoils by platitudes about the precisian Brutus, who certainly did not give Rome liberty.

Byron's other Venetian Drama, the *Two Foscari*, composed at Ravenna, between the 11th of June and the 10th of July, 1821, and published in the following December, is another record of the same failure and the same mortification, due to the same causes. In this play, as Jeffrey points out, the preservation of the unities had a still more disastrous effect. The author's determination to avoid rant did not hinder his frequently adopting an inflated style ; while professing to follow the ancient rules, he forgets the warning of Horace so far as to permit the groans of the tortured Foscari to be heard on the stage. The declamations of Marina produce no effect on the action, and the vindictiveness of Loricano, though effectively pointed in the closing words, "He has paid me," is not rendered interesting, either by a well established injury, or by any trace of Iago's subtle genius.

In the same volume appeared *Sardanapalus*, written in the previous May, and dedicated to Goethe. In this play, which marks the author's last reversion to the East, we are more arrested by the majesty of the theme—

Thirteen hundred years
Of empire ending like a shepherd's tale,—

by the grandeur of some of the passages, and by the

development of the chief character, made more vivid by its being distinctly autobiographical. Sardanapalus himself is Harold, raised "high on a throne," and rousing himself at the close from a life of effeminate lethargy. Myrrha has been often identified with La Guiccioli, and the hero's relation to his Queen Zarina compared with that of the poet to his wife; but in his portrait of the former the author's defective capacity to represent national character is manifest: Myrrha is only another Gulnare, Medora, or Zuleika. In the domestic play of *Werner*—completed at Pisa in January, 1822, and published in November, there is no merit either of plan or execution; for the plot is taken, with little change, from "The German's Tale," written by Harriet Lee, and the treatment is throughout prosaic. Byron was never a master of blank verse; but *Werner*, his sole success on the modern British stage, is written in a style fairly parodied by Campbell, when he cut part of the author's preface into lines, and pronounced them as good as any in the play.

The *Deformed Transformed*, another adaptation, suggested by a forgotten novel called *The Three Brothers*, with reminiscences of *Faust*, and possibly of Scott's *Black Dwarf*, was begun at Pisa in 1821, but not published till January, 1824. This fragment owes its interest to the bitter infusion of personal feeling in the first scene, and its occasional charm to the march of some of the lines, especially those describing the Bourbon's advance on Rome; but the effect of the magical element is killed by previous parallels, while the story is chaotic and absurd. The *Deformed Transformed* bears somewhat the same relation to *Manfred* as *Heaven and Earth*—an occasionally graphic dream of the world before the Deluge, written October, 1821, and

issued about the same time as Moore's *Loves of the Angels*, on a similar theme—does to *Cain*. The last named, begun in July, and finished at Ravenna in September, is the author's highest contribution to the metaphysical poetry of the century. In *Cain* Byron grapples with the perplexities of a belief which he never either accepted or rejected, and with the yet deeper problems of life and death, of good and ill. In dealing with these his position is not that of one justifying the ways of God to man—though he somewhat disingenuously appeals to Milton in his defence—nor that of the definite antagonism of *Queen Mab*. The distinction in this respect between Byron and Shelley cannot be over-emphasized. The latter had a firm faith other than that commonly called Christian. The former was, in the proper sense of the word, a sceptic, beset with doubts, and seeking for a solution which he never found, shifting in his expression of them with every change of a fickle and inconsistent temperament. The atmosphere of *Cain* is almost wholly negative; for under the guise of a drama, which is mainly a dialogue between two halves of his mind, the author appears to sweep aside with something approaching to disdain the answers of a blindly accepted tradition, or of a superficial optimism, e.g.—

CAIN. Then my father's God did well
When he prohibited the fatal tree.

LUCIFER. But had done better in not planting it.

Again, a kid, after suffering agonies from the sting of a reptile, is restored by antidotes—

Behold, my son! said Adam, how from evil
Springs good!

LUCIFER. What didst thou answer?

CAIN. Nothing; for

He is my father; but I thought, that 'twere

A better portion for the animal
Never to have been stung at all.

This rebellious nature naturally yields to the arguments of Lucifer, a spirit in which much of the grandeur of Milton's Satan is added to the subtlety of Mephistopheles. In the first scene Cain is introduced, rebelling against toils imposed on him by an offence committed before he was born,—“I sought not to be born”—the answer, that toil is a good, being precluded by its authoritative representation as a punishment; in which mood he is confirmed by the entrance and reasonings of the Tempter, who identifies the Deity with Seva the Destroyer, hints at the dreadful visitation of the yet untasted death; when Adah, entering, takes him at first for an angel, and then recognizes him as a fiend. Her invocation to Eve, and comparison of the “heedless, harmless, wantonness of bliss” in Eden, to the later lot of those girt about with demons from whose fascination they cannot fly, is one of the most striking in the drama; as is the line put into the mouth of the poet's most beautiful female character, to show that God cannot be alone,—

What else can joy be, but diffusing joy?

Her subsequent contrast of Lucifer with the other angels is more after the style of Shelley than anything else in Byron—

As the silent sunny moon,
All light, they look upon us. But thou seemst
Like an ethereal night, where long white clouds
Streak the deep purple, and unnumber'd stars
Spangle the wonderful mysterious vault
With things that look as if they would be suns—
So beautiful, unnumber'd and endearing;

Not dazzling, and yet drawing us to them,
They fill my eyes with tears, and so dost thou.

The flight with Lucifer, in the second act, in the abyss of space and through the Hades of "uncreated night," with the vision of long-wrecked worlds, and the "interminable gloomy realms

Of swimming shadows and enormous shapes,

—suggested, as the author tells us, by the reading of Cuvier—leaves us with impressions of grandeur and desolation which no other passages of English poetry can convey. Lord Byron has elsewhere exhibited more versatility of fancy and richness of illustration, but nowhere else has he so nearly "struck the stars." From constellation to constellation the pair speed on, cleaving the blue with mighty wings, but finding in all a blank, like that in Richter's wonderful dream. The result on the mind of Cain is summed in the lines on the fatal tree,—

It was a lying tree—for we *know* nothing;
At least, it *promised knowledge* at the price
Of death—but *knowledge* still; but what *knows* man?

A more modern poet answers, after beating at the same iron gates, "Behold, we know not anything." The most beautiful remaining passage is Cain's reply to the question—what is more beautiful to him than all that he has seen in the "unimaginable ether"?—

My sister Adah.—All the stars of heaven,
The deep blue noon of night, lit by an orb
Which looks a spirit, or a spirit's world—
The hues of twilight—the sun's gorgeous coming—
His setting indescribable, which fills
My eyes with pleasant tears as I behold
Him sink, and feel my heart flow softly with him
Along that western paradise of clouds—

The forest shade—the green bough—the bird's voice —
 The vesper bird's, which seems to sing of love,
 And mingles with the song of cherubim,
 As the day closes over Eden's walls :—
 All these are nothing, to my eyes and heart,
 Like Adah's face.

Lucifer's speech at the close of the act is perhaps too Miltonic to be absolutely original. Returning to earth, we have a pastoral, of which Sir Egerton Brydges justly and sufficiently remarks, "The censorious may say what they will, but there are speeches in the mouth of Cain and Adah, especially regarding their child, which nothing in English poetry but the 'wood-notes wild' of Shakespeare, ever equalled." Her cry, as Cain seems to threaten the infant, followed by the picture of his bloom and joy, is a touch of perfect pathos. Then comes the interview with the pious Abel, who is amazed at the lurid light in the eyes of his brother, with the spheres "singing in thunder round" him—the two sacrifices, the murder, the shriek of Zillah—

Father! Eve!

Adah! Come hither! Death is in the world;

Cain's rallying from stupor—

I am awake at last—a dreary dream
 Had madden'd me,—but he shall never wake:

the curse of Eve; and the close—*μείζον ἢ κατὰ δάκρυα*—

CAIN. Leave me.

ADAH. Why all have left thee.

CAIN. And wherefore lingerest thou? Dost thou not fear?

ADAH. I fear

Nothing, except to leave thee.

* * * * *

CAIN. Eastward from Eden will we take our way.

ADAM. Leave! thou shalt be my guide; and may our God
Be thine! Now let us carry forth our children.

CAIN. And *he* who lieth there was childless. I
Have dried the fountain of a gentle race.
O Abel!

ADAM. Peace be with him.

CAIN. But with *me*!

Cain, between which and the *Cenci* lies the award of the greatest single performance in dramatic shape of our century, raised a storm. It was published, with *Sardanapalus* and *The Two Foscari* in December, 1821, and the critics soon gave evidence of the truth of Elze's remark—"In England freedom of action is cramped by the want of freedom of thought. The converse is the case with us Germans; freedom of thought is restricted by the want of freedom in action. To us this scepticism presents nothing in the least fearful." But with us it appeared as if a literary Guy Fawkes had been detected in the act of blowing up half the cathedrals and all the chapels of the country. The rage of insular orthodoxy was in proportion to its impotence. Every scribbler with a cassock denounced the book and its author, though few attempted to answer him. The hubbub was such that Byron wrote to Murray, authorizing him to disclaim all responsibility, and offering to refund the payment he had received. "Say that both you and Mr. Gifford remonstrated. I will come to England to stand trial. 'Me, me, adsum qui feci,'"—and much to the same effect. The book was pirated; and on the publisher's application to have an injunction, Lord Eldon refused to grant it. The majority of the minor reviewers became hysterical, and Dr. Watkins, amid much almost inarticulate raving, said that Sir Walter Scott, who had gratefully accepted the dedication, would go down to posterity with the

brand of *Cain* upon his brow. Several even of the higher critics took fright. Jeffrey, while protesting his appreciation of the literary merits of the work, lamented its tendency to unsettle faith. Mr. Campbell talked of its "frightful audacity." Bishop Heber wrote at great length to prove that its spirit was more dangerous than that of *Paradise Lost*—and succeeded. The *Quarterly* began to cool towards the author. Moore wrote to him, that Cain was "wonderful, terrible, never to be forgotten," but "dreaded and deprecated" the influence of Shelley. Byron showed the letter to Shelley, who wrote to a common friend to assure Mr. Moore that he had not the smallest influence over his lordship in matters of religion, and only wished he had, as he would "employ it to eradicate from his great mind the delusions of Christianity, which seem perpetually to recur, and to lie in ambush for the hours of sickness and distress." Shelley elsewhere writes: "What think you of Lord B.'s last volume? In my opinion it contains finer poetry than has appeared in England since *Paradise Lost*. Cain is apocalyptic; it is a revelation not before communicated to man." In the same strain, Scott says of the author of the "grand and tremendous drama:" "He has certainly matched Milton on his own ground." The worst effect of those attacks appears in the shifts to which Byron resorted to explain himself,—to be imputed, however, not to cowardice, but to his wavering habit of mind. Great writers in our country have frequently stirred difficult questions in religion and life, and then seemed to be half scared, like Rouget de Lisle, by the reverberation of their own voices. Shelley almost alone was always ready to declare, "I meant what I said, and stand to it."

Byron having, with or without design, arraigned some of the Thirty-Nine Articles of his countrymen, proceeded in the following month (October 1821) to commit an outrage, yet more keenly resented, on the memory of their sainted king, the pattern of private virtue and public vice, George III. The perpetration of this occurred in the course of the last of his numerous literary duels, of which it was the close. That Mr. Southey was a well-meaning and independent man of letters, there can be no doubt. It does not require the conclusive testimony of the esteem of Savage Landor to compel our respect for the author of the *Life of Nelson*, and the open-handed friend of Coleridge; nor is it any disparagement that, with the last-named and with Wordsworth, he in middle life changed his political and other opinions. But in his dealings with Lord Byron, Southey had "eaten of the insane root." He attacked a man of incomparably superior powers, for whom his utter want of humour—save in its comparatively childish forms—made him a ludicrously unequal match, and paid the penalty in being gibbeted in satires that will endure with the language. The strife, which seems to have begun on Byron's leaving England, rose to its height when his lordship, in the humorous observations and serious defence of his character against "the Remarks" in Blackwood, 1819 (August), accused the Laureate of apostasy, treason, and slander.

In 1821, when the latter published his *Vision of Judgment*—the most quaintly preposterous panegyric ever penned—he prefixed to it a long explanatory note, in the course of which he characterizes *Don Juan* as a "monstrous combination of horror and mockery, lewdness and impiety," regrets that it has not been brought under the lash of the law, salutes the writer as chief of the

Satanic school, inspired by the spirits of Moloch and Belial, and refers to the remorse that will overtake him on his death-bed. To which Byron, *inter alia*: "Mr. Southey, with a cowardly ferocity, exults over the anticipated death-bed repentance of the objects of his dislike, and indulges himself in a pleasant 'Vision of Judgment,' in prose, as well as verse, full of impious impudence. What Mr. Southey's sensations or ours may be in the awful moment of leaving this state of existence, neither he nor we can pretend to decide. In common, I presume, with most men of any reflection, I have not waited for a death-bed to repent of many of my actions, notwithstanding the 'diabolical pride' which this pitiful renegado in his rancour would impute to those who scorn him." This dignified, though trenchant, rejoinder would have been unanswerable; but the writer goes on to charge the Laureate with spreading calumnies. To this charge Southey, in January, 1822, replies with "a direct and positive denial," and then proceeds to talk at large of the "whip and branding iron," "slaves of sensuality," "stones from slings," "Goliaths," "public panders," and what not, in the manner of the brave days of old.

In February Byron, having seen this assault in the *Courier*, writes off in needless heat, "I have got Southey's pretended reply; what remains to be done is to call him out,"—and despatches a cartel of mortal defiance. Mr. Douglas Kinnaird, through whom this was sent, judiciously suppressed it, and the author's thirst for literary blood was destined to remain unquenched. Meanwhile he had written his own *Vision of Judgment*. This extraordinary work, having been refused by both Murray and Longman, appeared in 1822 in the pages of the *Liberal*. It passed the bounds of British endurance; and the publisher, Mr.

John Hunt, was prosecuted and fined for the publication.

Readers of our day will generally admit that the "gouty hexameters" of the original poem, which celebrates the apotheosis of King George in heaven, are much more blasphemous than the *ottava rima* of the travesty, which professes to narrate the difficulties of his getting there. Byron's *Vision of Judgment* is as unmistakably the first of parodies as the *Iliad* is the first of epics, or the *Pilgrim's Progress* the first of allegories. In execution it is almost perfect. *Don Juan* is in scope and magnitude a far wider work ; but no considerable series of stanzas in *Don Juan* are so free from serious artistic flaw. From first to last, every epithet hits the white ; every line that does not convulse with laughter stings or lashes. It rises to greatness by the fact that, underneath all its lambent buffoonery, it is aflame with righteous wrath. Nowhere in such space, save in some of the prose of Swift, is there in English so much scathing satire.

CHAPTER IX.

1821—1823.

PISA—GENOA—DON JUAN.

BYRON, having arrived at Pisa with his troop of carriages, horses, dogs, fowls, servants, and a monkey, settled himself quietly in the Palazzo Lanfranchi for ten months, interrupted only by a sojourn of six weeks in the neighbourhood of Leghorn. His life in the old feudal building followed in the main the tenour of his life at Ravenna. He rose late, received visitors in the afternoons, played billiards, rode or practised with his pistols, in concert with Shelley, whom he refers to at this time as "the most companionable man under thirty" he had ever met. Both poets were good shots, but Byron the safest; for, though his hand often shook, he made allowance for the vibration, and never missed his mark. On one occasion he set up a slender cane, and at twenty paces divided it with his bullet. The early part of the evening he gave to a frugal meal and the society of La Guiccioli—now apparently, in defiance of the statute of limitations, established under the same roof—and then sat late over his verses. He was disposed to be more sociable than at Venice or Ravenna, and occasionally entertained strangers; but his intimate acquaintanceship was confined to Captain Williams and his wife, and Shelley's cousin, Captain

Medwin. The latter used frequently to dine and sit with his host till the morning, collecting materials for the *Conversations* which he afterwards gave to the world. The value of these reminiscences is impaired by the fact of their recording, as serious revelations, the absurd confidences in which the poet's humour for mystification was wont to indulge. Another of the group, an Irishman, called Taafe, is made, in his Lordship's correspondence of the period, to cut a somewhat comical figure. The master-passion of this worthy and genial fellow was to get a publisher for a fair commentary on Dante, to which he had firmly linked a very bad translation, and for about six months Byron pesters Murray with constant appeals to satisfy him; e.g. November 16, "He must be gratified, though the reviewers will make him suffer more tortures than there are in his original." March 6, "He will die if he is not published; he will be damned if he is; but that he don't mind." March 8, "I make it a point that he shall be in print; it will make the man so exuberantly happy. He is such a good-natured Christian that we must give him a shove through the press. Besides, he has had another fall from his horse into a ditch." Taafe, whose horsemanship was on a par with his poetry, can hardly have been consulted as to the form assumed by these apparently fruitless recommendations, so characteristic of the writer's frequent kindness and constant love of mischief. About this time Byron received a letter from Mr. Shepherd, a gentleman in Somersetshire, referring to the death of his wife, among whose papers he had found the record of a touching, because evidently heart-felt, prayer for the poet's reformation, conversion, and restored peace of mind. To this letter he at once returned an answer,

marked by much of the fine feeling of his best moods. Pisa, December 8: "Sir, I have received your letter. I need not say that the extract which it contains has affected me, because it would imply a want of all feeling to have read it with indifference. . . . Your brief and simple picture of the excellent person, whom I trust you will again meet, cannot be contemplated without the admiration due to her virtues and her pure and unpretending piety. I do not know that I ever met with anything so unostentatiously beautiful. Indisputably, the firm believers in the Gospel have a great advantage over all others—for this simple reason, that if true they will have their reward hereafter; and if there be no hereafter, they can but be with the infidel in his eternal sleep. . . . But a man's creed does not depend upon *himself*: who can say, I *will* believe this, that, or the other? and least of all that which he least can comprehend. . . . I can assure you that not all the fame which ever cheated humanity into higher notions of its own importance, would ever weigh in my mind against the pure and pious interest which a virtuous being may be pleased to take in my behalf. In this point of view I would not exchange the prayer of the deceased in my behalf for the united glory of Homer, Cæsar, and Napoleon."

The letter to Lady Byron, which he afterwards showed to Lady Blessington, must have borne about the same date; and we have a further indication of his thoughts reverting homeward in an urgent request to Murray—written on December 10th, Ada's sixth birthday—to send his daughter's miniature. After its arrival nothing gave him greater pleasure than to be told of its strong likeness to himself. In the course of the same month an

event occurred which strangely illustrates the manners of the place, and the character of the two poets. An unfortunate fanatic having taken it into his head to steal the wafer-box out of a church at Lucca, and being detected, was, in accordance with the ecclesiastical law till lately maintained against sacrilege, condemned to be burnt alive. Shelley, who believed that the sentence would really be carried into effect, proposed to Byron that they should gallop off together, and by aid of their servants rescue by force the intended victim. Byron, however, preferred in the first place, to rely on diplomacy; some vigorous letters passed; ultimately a representation, conveyed by Taaffe to the English Ambassador, led to a commutation of the sentence, and the man was sent to the galleys.

The January of 1822 was marked by the addition to the small circle of Captain E. J. Trelawny, the famous rover and bold free-lance (long sole survivor of the remarkable group), who accompanied Lord Byron to Greece, and has recorded a variety of incidents of the last months of his life. Trelawny, who appreciated Shelley with an intensity that is often apt to be exclusive, saw, or has reported, for the most part the weaker side of Byron. We are constrained to accept as correct the conjecture that his judgment was biassed by their rivalry in physical prowess, and the political differences which afterwards developed between them. Letters to his old correspondents—to Scott about the *Waverleys*, to Murray about the Dramas, and the *Vision of Judgment*, and *Cain*—make up almost the sole record of the poet's pursuits during the five following months. On February 6th he sent, through Mr. Kinnaid, the challenge to Southey, of the suppression of which he was not aware till May 17. The same letter contains a

sheaf of the random cynicisms, as—"Cash is virtue," "Money is power; and when Socrates said he knew nothing, he meant he had not a drachma"—by which he sharpened the shafts of his assailants. A little later, on occasion of the death of Lady Noel, he expresses himself with natural bitterness on hearing that she had in her will recorded a wish against his daughter Ada seeing his portrait. In March he sat, along with La Guiccioli, to the sculptor Bartolini. On the 24th, when the company were on one of their riding excursions outside the town, a half-drunken dragoon on horseback broke through them, and by accident or design knocked Shelley from his seat. Byron, pursuing him along the Lung' Arno, called for his name, and, taking him for an officer, flung his glove. The sound of the fray brought the servants of the Lanfranchi to the door; and one of them, it was presumed—though in the scuffle everything remained uncertain—seriously wounded the dragoon in the side. An investigation ensued, as the result of which the Gambas were ultimately exiled from Tuscany, and the party of friends was practically broken up. Shelley and his wife, with the Williamses and Trelawny, soon after settled at the Villa Magni at Lerici in the Gulf of Spezia. Byron, with the Countess and her brother, established themselves in the Villa Rossa at Monte Nero, a suburb of Leghorn, from which port at this date the remains of Allegra were conveyed to England.

Among the incidents of this residence were, the homage paid to the poet by a party of Americans; the painting of his portrait (and that of La Guiccioli) by the artist West, who has left a pleasing account of his visits; Byron's letter making inquiry about the country of Bolivar (where it was his fancy to settle);

and another of those disturbances by which he seemed destined to be harassed. One of his servants—among whom were unruly spirits, apparently selected with a kind of *Corsair* bravado,—had made an assault on Count Pietro, wounding him in the face. This outburst, though followed by tears and penitence, confirmed the impression of the Tuscan police that the whole company were dangerous, and made the Government press for their departure. In the midst of the uproar, there suddenly appeared at the villa Mr. Leigh Hunt, with his wife and six children. They had taken passage to Genoa, where they were received by Trelawny, in command of the “*Bolivar*”—a yacht constructed in that port for Lord Byron, simultaneously with the “*Don Juan*” for Shelley. The latter, on hearing of the arrival of his friends, came to meet them at Leghorn, and went with them to Pisa. Early in July they were all established on the Lung’ Arno, having assigned to them the ground floor of the palazzo.

We have now to deal briefly—amid conflicting asseverations it is hard to deal fairly—with the last of the vexatiously controverted episodes which need perplex our narrative. Byron, in wishing Moore from Ravenna a merry Christmas for 1820, proposes that they shall embark together in a newspaper, “with some improvement on the plan of the present scoundrels,” “to give the age some new lights on policy, poesy, biography, criticism, morality, theology,” &c. Moore absolutely refusing to entertain the idea, Hunt’s name was brought forward in connexion with it, during the visit of Shelley. Shortly after the return of the latter to Pisa, he writes (August 26) to Hunt, stating that Byron was anxious to start a periodical work, to be conducted in Italy, and had pro-

posed that they should both go shares in the concern, on which follow some suggestions of difficulties about money. Nevertheless, in August, 1821, he presses Hunt to come. Moore, on the other hand, strongly remonstrates against the project. "I heard some days ago that Leigh Hunt was on his way to you with all his family; and the idea seems to be that you and he and Shelley are to conspire together in the *Examiner*. I deprecate such a plan with all my might. Partnerships in fame, like those in trade, make the strongest party answer for the rest. I tremble even for you with such a bankrupt Co.! You must stand alone." Shelley—who had, in the meantime, given his bond to Byron for an advance of 200*l.* towards the expenses of his friends, besides assisting them himself to the utmost of his power—began, shortly before their arrival, to express grave doubts as to the success of the alliance. His last published letter—written July 5th, 1822—after they had settled at Pisa, is full of forebodings. On the 8th he set sail in the "Don Juan"—

That fatal and perfidious bark,
Built in th' eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,

and was overtaken by the storm in which he perished. Three days after, Trelawny rode to Pisa, and told Byron of his fears, when the poet's lips quivered, and his voice faltered. On the 22nd of July the bodies of Shelley, Williams, and Vivian, were cast ashore. On the 16th August, Hunt, Byron, and Trelawny were present at the terribly weird cremation, which they have all described. At a later date, the two former were seized with a fit of delirium which is one of the phases of the tension of grief. Byron's references to the event are expressions less of the loss which he indubitably

felt, than of his indignation at the "world's wrong." "Thus," he writes, "there is another man gone, about whom the world was ill-naturedly and ignorantly and brutally mistaken. It will, perhaps, do him justice now, when he can be no better for it." Towards the end of the same letter the spirit of his dead friend seems to inspire the sentence—"With these things and these fellows it is necessary, in the present clash of philosophy and tyranny, to throw away the scabbard. I know it is against fearful odds, but the battle must be fought."

Meanwhile, shortly after the new settlement at the Lanfranchi, the preparations for issuing the *Liberal*, edited by Leigh Hunt in Italy, and published by John Hunt in London, progressed. The first number, which appeared in September, was introduced, after a few words of preface, by the *Vision of Judgment*, with the signature Quevedo Redivivus, and adorned by Shelley's translation of the "May-Day Night," in *Faust*. It contained besides, the *Letter to the Editor of my Grandmother's Review*, an indifferent Florentine story, a German apologue, and a gossiping account of Pisa, presumably by Hunt. Three others followed, containing Byron's *Heaven and Earth*, his translation of the *Morgante Maggiore*, and *The Blues*—a very slight, if not silly, satire on literary ladies; some of Shelley's posthumous minor poems, among them "I arise from dreams of thee," and a few of Hazlitt's essays, including, however, none of his best. Leigh Hunt himself wrote most of the rest, one of his contributions being a palpable imitation of *Don Juan*, entitled the *Book of Beginnings*, but he confesses that owing to his weak health and low spirits at the time, none of these did justice to his ability; and the general manner of the magazine being insufficiently vigorous to carry off the

frequent eccentricity of its matter, the prejudices against it prevailed, and the enterprise came to an end. Partners in failing concerns are apt to dispute; in this instance the unpleasantness which arose at the time rankled in the mind of the survivor, and gave rise to his singularly tasteless and injudicious book—a performance which can be only in part condoned by the fact of Hunt's afterwards expressing regret, and practically withdrawing it. He represents himself throughout as a much-injured man, lured to Italy by misrepresentations, that he might give the aid of his journalistic experience and undeniable talents to the advancement of a mercenary enterprise, and that when it failed he was despised, insulted, and rejected. Byron, on the other hand, declares, "The Hunts pressed me to engage in this work, and in an evil hour I consented;" and his subsequent action in the matter, if not always gentle never unjust, goes to verify his statements in the letters of the period. "I am afraid," he writes from Genoa, Oct. 9, 1822, "the journal is a bad business. I have done all I can for Leigh Hunt since he came here; but it is almost useless. His wife is ill, his six children not very tractable, and in the affairs of this world he himself is a child." Later he says to Murray, "You and your friends, by your injudicious rudeness, cement a connexion which you strove to prevent, and which, had the Hunts prospered, would not in all probability have continued. As it is . . . I can't leave them among the breakers." On February 20th we have, his last word on the subject, to the same effect.

In the following sentences, Moore seems to give a fair statement of the motives which led to the establishment of the unfortunate journal—"The chief induce-

ments on the part of Lord Byron to this unworthy alliance were, in the first place, a wish to second the kind views of his friend Shelley in inviting Mr. Hunt to Italy; and in the next, a desire to avail himself of the aid of one so experienced as an editor in the favourite object he has so long contemplated of a periodical work in which all the offspring of his genius might be received as they sprung to light." For the accomplishment of this purpose Mr. Leigh Hunt was a singularly ill-chosen associate. A man of Radical opinions on all matters, not only of religion but of society—opinions which he acquired and held easily but firmly—could never recognize the propriety of the claim to deference which "the noble poet" was always too eager to assert, and was inclined to take liberties which his patron perhaps superciliously repelled. Mrs. Hunt does not seem to have been a very judicious person. "Trelawny here," said Byron jocularly, "has been speaking against my morals." "It is the first time I ever heard of them," she replied. Mr. Hunt, by his own admission, had "peculiar notions on the subject of money." Byron, on his part, was determined not to be "put upon," and doled out through his steward stated allowances to Hunt, who says that only "stern necessity and a large family" induced him to accept them. Hunt's expression that the 200*l.* was, *in the first instance*, a debt to Shelley, points to the conclusion that it was remitted on that poet's death. Besides this, Byron maintained the family till they left Genoa for Florence in 1823, and defrayed up to that date all their expenses. He gave his contributions to the *Liberal* gratis; and, again by Hunt's own confession, left to him and his brother the profits of the proprietorship. According to Mr. Galt "The whole extent of the pecuniary obligation appears not to have exceeded 500*l.*; but, little or great,

the manner in which it was recollected reflects no credit either on the head or heart of the debtor."

Of the weaknesses on which the writer—bent on verifying Pope's lines on Atossa—from his vantage in the ground-floor, was enabled to dilate, many are but slightly magnified. We are told for instance, in very many words, that Byron clung to the privileges of his rank while wishing to seem above them; that he had a small library, and was a one-sided critic; that Bayle and Gibbon supplied him with the learning he had left at school; that, being a good rider with a graceful seat, he liked to be told of it; that he showed letters he ought not to have shown; that he pretended to think worse of Wordsworth than he did; that he knew little of art or music, adored Rossini, and called Rubens a dauber; that, though he wrote *Don Juan* under gin and water, he had not a strong head, &c., &c. It is true, but not new. But when Hunt proceeds to say that Byron had no sentiment; that La Guiccioli did not really care much about him; that he admired Gifford because he was a sycophant, and Scott because he loved a lord; that he had no heart for anything except a feverish notoriety; that he was a miser from his birth, and had "as little regard for liberty as Alfieri,"—it is new enough, but it is manifestly not true. Hunt's book, which begins with a caricature on the frontispiece, and is inspired in the main by uncharitableness, yet contains here and there gleams of a deeper insight than we find in all the volumes of Moore—an insight, which, in spite of his irritated egotism, is the mark of a man with the instincts of a poet, with some cosmopolitan sympathies, and a courage on occasion to avow them at any risk. "Lord Byron," he says truly, "has been too much admired by the English because he was sulky and

wilful, and reflected in his own person their love of dictation and excitement. They owe his memory a greater regard, and would do it much greater honour if they admired him for letting them know they were not so perfect a nation as they supposed themselves, and that they might take as well as give lessons of humanity, by a candid comparison of notes with civilization at large."

In July, when at Leghorn, the Gambas received orders to leave Tuscany; and on his return to Pisa, Byron, being persecuted by the police, began to prepare for another change. After entertaining projects about Greece, America, and Switzerland — Trelawny undertaking to have the "Bolivar" conveyed over the Alps to the Lake of Geneva — he decided on following his friends to Genoa. He left in September with La Guiccioli, passed by Lerici and Sestri, and then for the ten remaining months of his Italian life took up his quarters at Albaro, about a mile to the east of the city, in the Villa Saluzzo, which Mrs. Shelley had procured for him and his party. She herself settled with the Hunts — who travelled about the same time, at Byron's expense, but in their own company — in the neighbouring Casa Negroto. Not far off, Mr. Savage Landor was in possession of the Casa Pallavicini, but there was little intercourse between the three. Landor and Byron, in many respects more akin than any other two Englishmen of their age, were always separated by an unhappy bar or intervening mist. The only family with whom the poet maintained any degree of intimacy was that of the Earl of Blessington, consisting of the Earl himself — a gouty old gentleman, with stories about him of the past — the Countess, and her sister, Miss Power, and the "cupidon déchaîné," the Anglo-French Count Alfred d'Orsay — who were to

take part in stories of the future. In the spring of 1823, Byron persuaded them to occupy the Villa Paradiso, and was accustomed to accompany them frequently on horseback excursions along the coast to their favourite Nervi. It has been said that Lady Blessington's *Conversations with Lord Byron* are, as regards trustworthiness, on a par with Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*. Let this be so, they are still of interest on points of fact which it must have been easier to record than to imagine. However adorned, or the reverse, by the fancies of a habitual novelist, they convey the impressions of a good-humoured, lively, and fascinating woman, derived from a more or less intimate association with the most brilliant man of the age. Of his personal appearance—a matter of which she was a good judge—we have the following: "One of Byron's eyes was larger than the other; his nose was rather thick, so he was best seen in profile; his mouth was splendid, and his scornful expression was real, not affected; but a sweet smile often broke through his melancholy. He was at this time very pale and thin (which indicates the success of his regimen of reduction since leaving Venice). His hair was dark brown, here and there turning grey. His voice was harmonious, clear and low. There is some gaucherie in his walk, from his attempts to conceal his lameness. Ada's portrait is like him, and he is pleased at the likeness, but hoped she would not turn out to be clever—at any events not poetical. He is fond of gossip, and apt to speak slightly of some of his friends, but is loyal to others. His great defect is flippancy, and a total want of self-possession." The narrator also dwells on his horror of interviewers, by whom at this time he was even more than usually beset. One visitor of the period ingenuously observes—

"Certain persons will be chagrined to hear that Byron's mode of life does not furnish the smallest food for calumny." Another says, "I never saw a countenance more composed and still—I might even add, more sweet and prepossessing. But his temper was easily ruffled and for a whole day; he could not endure the ringing of bells, bribed his neighbours to repress their noises, and failing, retaliated by surpassing them; he never forgave Colonel Carr for breaking one of his dog's ribs, though he generally forgave injuries without forgetting them. He had a bad opinion of the inertness of the Genoese; for whatever he himself did he did with a will—'toto se corpore miscuit,' and was wont to assume a sort of dictatorial tone—as if 'I have said it, and it must be so' were enough."

From these waifs and strays of gossip we return to a subject of deeper interest. The Countess of Blessington, with natural curiosity, was anxious to elicit from Byron some light on the mystery of his domestic affairs, and renewed the attempt previously made by Madame de Staël, to induce him to some movement towards a reconciliation with his wife. His reply to this overture was to show her a letter which he had written to Lady Byron from Pisa, but never forwarded, of the tone of which the following extracts must be a sufficient indication:—"I have to acknowledge the receipt of Ada's hair. . . . I also thank you for the inscription of the date and name; and I will tell you why. I believe they are the only two or three words of your handwriting in my possession, for your letters I returned, and except the two words—or rather the one word 'household' written twice—in an old account book, I have no other. Every day which keeps us asunder should, after so long a period, rather soften

our mutual feelings, which must always have one rallying-point as long as our child exists. We both made a bitter mistake, but now it is over. I considered our re-union as not impossible for more than a year after the separation, but then I gave up the hope. I am violent, but not malignant ; for only fresh provocations can awaken my resentment. Remember that if you have injured me in aught, this forgiveness is something, and that if I have injured you, it is something more still, if it be true, as moralists assert, that the most offending are the least forgiving." "It is a strange business," says the Countess, about Lady Byron. "When he was praising her mental and personal qualifications, I asked him how all that he now said agreed with certain sarcasms supposed to be a reference to her in his works. He smiled, shook his head, and said, they were meant to spite and vex her, when he was wounded and irritated at her refusing to receive or answer his letters ; that he was sorry he had written them, but might on similar provocations recur to the same vengeance." On another occasion he said, "Lady B.'s first idea is what is due to herself. I wish she thought a little more of what is due to others. My besetting sin is a want of that self-respect which she has in excess. When I have broken out, on slight provocation, into one of my ungovernable fits of rage, her calmness piqued and seemed to reproach me ; it gave her an air of superiority that vexed and increased my *mauvaise humeur*." To Lady Blessington as to every one, he always spoke of Mrs. Leigh with the same unwavering admiration, love, and respect.

"My first impressions were melancholy—my poor mother gave them : but to my sister, who, incapable of wrong herself, suspected no wrong in others, I owe the little good of

which I can boast : and had I earlier known her it might have influenced my destiny. Augusta was to me in the hour of need a tower of strength. Her affection was my last rallying-point, and is now the only bright spot that the horizon of England offers to my view. She has given me such good advice—and yet finding me incapable of following it, loved and pitied me but the more because I was erring.” Similarly, in the height of his spleen, writes Leigh Hunt—“I believe there did exist one person to whom he would have been generous, if she pleased : perhaps was so. At all events, he left her the bulk of his property, and always spoke of her with the greatest esteem. This was his sister, Mrs. Leigh. He told me she used to call him ‘Baby Byron.’ It was easy to see that of the two persons she had by far the greater judgment.”

Byron having laid aside *Don Juan* for more than a year, in deference to La Guiccioli, was permitted to resume it again, in July, 1822, on a promise to observe the proprieties. Cantos vi.—xi. were written at Pisa. Cantos xii.—xvi. at Genoa, in 1823. These latter portions of the poem were published by John Hunt. His other works of the period are of minor consequence. The *Age of Bronze* is a declamation, rather than a satire, directed against the Convention of Cintra and the Congress of Verona, especially Lord Londonderry’s part in the latter, only remarkable, from its advice to the Greeks, to dread—

The false friend worse than the infuriate foe ;

i. e. to prefer the claw of the Tartar savage to the paternal hug of the great Bear—

Better still toil for masters, than await,
The slave of slaves, before a Russian gate.

In the *Island*—a tale of the mutiny of the “Bounty”—he reverts to the manner and theme of his old romances, finding a new scene in the Pacific for the exercise of his fancy. In this piece his love of nautical adventure reappears, and his idealization of primitive life, caught from Rousseau and Chateaubriand. There is more repose about this poem than in any of the author's other compositions. In its pages the sea seems to splash about rocks and caves that bask under a southern sun. “‘Byron, the sorcerer,’ he can do with me what he will,” said old Dr. Parr, on reading it. As the swan-song of the poet's sentimental verse, it has a pleasing if not pathetic calm. During the last years in Italy he planned an epic on the Conquest, and a play on the subject of Hannibal, neither of which was executed.

In the criticism of a famous work there is often little left to do but to criticise the critics—to bring to a focus the most salient things that have been said about it, to eliminate the absurd from the sensible, the discriminating from the commonplace. *Don Juan*, more than any of its precursors, is Byron, and it has been similarly handled. The early cantos were ushered into the world amid a chorus of mingled applause and execration. The minor Reviews, representing middle-class respectability, were generally vituperative, and the higher authorities divided in their judgments. The *British Magazine* said that “his lordship had degraded his personal character by the composition;” the *London*, that the poem was “a satire on decency;” the *Edinburgh Monthly*, that it was “a melancholy spectacle;” the *Eclectic*, that it was “an outrage worthy of detestation.” *Blackwood* declared that the author was “brutally outraging all the best feelings of humanity.” Moore characterizes it as “the most

painful display of the versatility of genius that has ever been left for succeeding ages to wonder at or deplore." Jeffrey found in the whole composition "a tendency to destroy all belief in the reality of virtue;" and Dr. John Watkins classically named it "the Odyssey of Immorality." "*Don Juan* will be read," wrote one critic, "as long as satire, wit, mirth, and supreme excellence shall be esteemed among men." "Stick to *Don Juan*," exhorted another; "it is the only sincere thing you have written, and it will live after all your *Harolds* have ceased to be 'a schoolgirl's tale, the wonder of an hour.' It is the best of all your works—the most spirited, the most straightforward, the most interesting, the most poetical." "It is a work," said Goethe, "full of soul, bitterly savage in its misanthropy, exquisitely delicate in its tenderness." Shelley confessed, "It fulfils in a certain degree what I have long preached, the task of producing something wholly new and relative to the age, and yet surpassingly beautiful." And Sir Walter Scott, in the midst of a hearty panegyric: "It has the variety of Shakespeare himself. Neither *Childe Harold*, nor the most beautiful of Byron's earlier tales, contain more exquisite poetry than is to be found scattered through the cantos of *Don Juan*, amidst verses which the author seems to have thrown from him with an effort as spontaneous as that of a tree resigning its leaves."

One noticeable feature about these comments is their sincerity: reviewing, however occasionally one-sided, had not then sunk to be the mere register of adverse or friendly cliques; and, with all his anxiety for its verdict, Byron never solicited the favour of any portion of the press. Another is, the fact that the adverse critics missed their mark. They had not learnt to say of a book of which they disapproved, that it was weak or dull: in pronouncing

it to be vicious, they helped to promote its sale ; and the most decried has been the most widely read of the author's works. Many of the readers of *Don Juan* have, it must be confessed, been found among those least likely to admire in it what is most admirable—who have been attracted by the very excesses of buffoonery, violations of good taste, and occasionally almost vulgar slang, which disfigure its pages. Their patronage is, at the best, of no more value than that of a mob gathered by a showy Shakespearian revival, and it has laid the volume open to the charge of being adapted “*laudari ab illaudatis*.” But the welcome of the work in other quarters is as indubitably due to higher qualities. In writing *Don Juan*, Byron attempted something that had never been done before, and his genius so chimed with his enterprise that it need never be done again. “Down,” cries M. Chasles, “with the imitators who did their best to make his name ridiculous.” In commenting on their failure, an Athenæum critic has explained the pre-estimated fitness of the ottava rima—the first six lines of which are a dance, and the concluding couplet a “break-down”—for the mock-heroic. Byron's choice of this measure may have been suggested by Whistlecraft ; but he had studied its cadence in Pulci, and the *Novelle Galanti* of Casti, to whom he is indebted for other features of his satire ; and he added to what has been well termed its characteristic jauntiness, by his almost constant use of the double rhyme. That the ottava rima is out of place in consistently pathetic poetry, may be seen from its obvious misuse in Keats's *Pot of Basil*. Many writers, from Tennant and Freret to Moultrie, have employed it in burlesque or mere society verse ; but Byron alone has employed it triumphantly, for he has made it the vehicle of thoughts grave as well as

gay, of "black spirits and white, red spirits and grey," of sparkling fancy, bitter sarcasm, and tender memories. He has swept into the pages of his poem the experience of thirty years of a life so crowded with vitality that our sense of the plethora of power which it exhibits makes us ready to condone its lapses. Byron, it has been said, balances himself on a ladder like other acrobats; but alone, like the Japanese master of the art, he all the while bears on his shoulders the weight of a man. Much of *Don Juan* is as obnoxious to criticism in detail as his earlier work; it has every mark of being written in hot haste. In the midst of the most serious passages (e.g. the "Ave Maria") we are checked in our course by bathos or commonplace and thrown where the writer did not mean to throw us: but the mocking spirit is so prevalently present that we are often left in doubt as to his design, and what is in *Harold* an outrage is in this case only a flaw. His command over the verse itself is almost miraculous: he glides from extreme to extreme, from punning to pathos, from melancholy to mad merriment, sighing or laughing by the way at his readers or at himself or at the stanzas. Into them he can fling anything under the sun, from a doctor's prescription to a metaphysical theory.

When Bishop Berkeley said there was no matter,
And proved it, 'twas no matter what he said,

is as cogent a refutation of idealism as the cumbrous wit of Scotch logicians.

The popularity of the work is due not mainly to the verbal skill which makes it rank as the *cleverest* of English verse compositions, to its shoals of witticisms, its winged words, telling phrases, and incomparable transitions; but to the fact that it continues to address a large class who

are not in the ordinary sense of the word lovers of poetry. *Don Juan* is emphatically the poem of intelligent men of middle age, who have grown weary of mere sentiment, and yet retain enough of sympathetic feeling to desire at times to recall it. Such minds, crusted like Plato's Glaucus with the world, are yet pervious to appeals to the spirit that survives beneath the dry dust amid which they move; but only at rare intervals can they accompany the pure lyrist "singing as if he would never be old," and they are apt to turn with some impatience even from *Romeo and Juliet* to *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. To them, on the other hand, the hard wit of *Hudibras* is equally tiresome, and more distasteful; their chosen friend is the humourist who, inspired by a subtle perception of the contradictions of life, sees matter for smiles in sorrow, and tears in laughter. Byron was not, in the highest sense, a great humourist; he does not blend together the two phases, as they are blended in single sentences or whole chapters of Sterne, in the April-sunshine of Richter, or in *Sartor Resartus*; but he comes near to produce the same effect by his unequalled power of alternating them. His wit is seldom hard, never dry, for it is moistened by the constant juxtaposition of sentiment. His tenderness is none the less genuine that he is perpetually jerking it away—an equally favourite fashion with Carlyle,—as if he could not trust himself to be serious for fear of becoming sentimental; and, in recollection of his frequent exhibitions of unaffected hysteria, we accept his own confession—

If I laugh at any mortal thing,
'Tis that I may not weep,

as a perfectly sincere comment on the most sincere, and therefore in many respects, the most effective, of his works. He has, after his way, endeavoured in grave prose and

light verse to defend it against its assailants ; saying, " In *Don Juan* I take a vicious and unprincipled character, and lead him through those ranks of society whose accomplishments cover and cloak their vices, and paint the natural effects ;" and elsewhere, that he means to make his scamp " end as a member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, or by the guillotine, or in an unhappy marriage." It were easy to dilate on the fact that in interpreting the phrases of the satirist into the language of the moralist we often require to read them backwards : Byron's own statement, " I hate a motive," is, however, more to the point :

But the fact is that I have nothing plann'd,
Unless it were to be a moment merry—
A novel word in my vocabulary.

Don Juan can only be credited with a text in the sense in which every large experience, of its own accord, conveys its lesson. It was to the author a picture of the world as he saw it ; and it is to us a mirror in which every attribute of his genius, every peculiarity of his nature, is reflected without distortion. After the audacious though brilliant opening, and the unfortunately pungent reference to the poet's domestic affairs, we find in the famous storm (c. ii.) a bewildering epitome of his prevailing manner. Home-sickness, sea-sickness, the terror of the tempest, " wailing, blasphemy, devotion," the crash of the wreck, the wild farewell, " the bubbling cry of some strong swimmer in his agony," the horrors of famine, the tale of the two fathers, the beautiful apparitions of the rainbow and the bird, the feast on Juan's spaniel, his reluctance to dine on " his pastor and his master," the consequences of eating Pedrillo,—all follow each other like visions in the phantasmagoria of a nightmare,

till at last the remnant of the crew are drowned by a ridiculous rhyme—

Finding no place for their landing better,
They ran the boat ashore,—and overset her.

Then comes the episode of Haidee, “a long low island song of ancient days,” the character of the girl herself being like a thread of pure gold running through the fabric of its surroundings, motley in every page; e.g., after the impassioned close of the “Isles of Greece,” we have the stanza:—

Thus sang, or would, or could, or should, have sung,
The modern Greek, in tolerable verse;
If not like Orpheus quite, when Greece was young,
Yet in those days he might have done much worse—

with which the author dashes away the romance of the song, and then launches into a tirade against Bob Southey’s epic and Wordsworth’s pedlar poems. This vein exhausted, we come to the “Ave Maria,” one of the most musical, and seemingly heartfelt, hymns in the language. The close of the ocean pastoral (in c. iv.) is the last of pathetic narrative in the book; but the same feeling that “mourns o’er the beauty of the Cyclades,” often re-emerges in shorter passages. The fifth and sixth cantos, in spite of the glittering sketch of Gulbeyaz, and the fawn-like image of Dudù, are open to the charge of diffuseness, and the character of Johnson is a failure. From the seventh to the tenth, the poem decidedly dips, partly because the writer had never been in Russia; then it again rises, and shows no sign of falling off to the end.

No part of the work has more suggestive interest or varied power than some of the later cantos, in which Juan is whirled through the vortex of the fashionable life which

Byron knew so well, loved so much, and at last esteemed so little. There is no richer piece of descriptive writing in his works than that of Newstead (in c. xiii.); nor is there any analysis of female character so subtle as that of the Lady Adeline. Conjectures as to the originals of imaginary portraits, are generally futile; but Miss Millpond—not Donna Inez—is obviously Lady Byron; in Adeline we may suspect that at Genoa he was drawing from the life in the Villa Paradiso; while Aurora Raby seems to be an idealization of La Guiccioli :—

Early in years, and yet more infantine
 In figure, she had something of sublime
 In eyes, which sadly shone, as seraphs' shine :
 All youth—but with an aspect beyond time ;
 Radiant and grave—as pitying man's decline ;
 Mournful—but mournful of another's crime,
 She look'd as if she sat by Eden's door,
 And grieved for those who could return no more.

She was a Catholic, too, sincere, austere,
 As far as her own gentle heart allow'd,
 And deem'd that fallen worship far more dear,
 Perhaps, because 'twas fallen : her sires were proud
 Of deeds and days, when they had fill'd the ear
 Of nations, and had never bent or bow'd
 To novel power ; and, as she was the last,
 She held her old faith and old feelings fast.

She gazed upon a world she scarcely knew,
 As seeking not to know it ; silent, lone,
 As grows a flower, thus quietly she grew,
 And kept her heart serene within its zone.

Constantly, towards the close of the work, there is an echo of home and country, a half involuntary cry after—

The love of higher things and better days ;
 Th' unbounded hope, and heavenly ignorance
 Of what is call'd the world and the world's ways.

In the concluding stanza of the last completed canto, beginning—

Between two worlds life hovers like a star,
'Twixt night and morn, on the horizon's verge—

we have a condensation of the refrain of the poet's philosophy ; but the main drift of the later books is a satire on London society. There are elements in a great city which may be wrought into something nobler than satire, for all the energies of the age are concentrated where passion is fiercest and thought intensest, amid the myriad sights and sounds of its glare and gloom. But those scenes, and the actors in them, are apt also to induce the frame of mind in which a prose satirist describes himself as reclining under an arcade of the Pantheon : "Not the Pantheon by the Piazza Navona, where the immortal gods were worshipped—the immortal gods now dead ; but the Pantheon in Oxford Street. Have not Selwyn, and Walpole, and March, and Carlisle figured there ? Has not Prince Florizel flounced through the hall in his rustling domino, and danced there in powdered splendour ? O my companions, I have drunk many a bout with you, and always found 'Vanitas Vanitatum' written on the bottom of the pot." This is the mind in which *Don Juan* interprets the universe, and paints the still living court of Florizel and his buffoons. A "nondescript and ever varying rhyme"—"a versified aurora borealis," half cynical, half Epicurean, it takes a partial though a subtle view of that microcosm on stilts called the great world. It complains that in the days of old "men made the manners—manners now make men." It concludes—

Good company's a chess-board, there are kings,
Queens, bishops, knights, rooks, pawns ; the world's a game.

It passes from a reflection on "the dreary *fuimus* of all things here" to the advice—

But "carpe diem," Juan, "carpe, carpe!"
To-morrow sees another race as gay
And transient, and devour'd by the same harpy.
"Life's a poor player,"—then play out the play.

It was the natural conclusion of the foregone stage of Byron's career. Years had given him power, but they were years in which his energies were largely wasted. Self-indulgence had not petrified his feeling, but it had thrown wormwood into its springs. He had learnt to look on existence as a walking shadow, and was strong only with the strength of a sincere despair.

Through life's road, so dim and dirty,
I have dragg'd to three and thirty.
What have those years left to me?
Nothing, except thirty-three.

These lines are the summary of one who had drained the draught of pleasure to the dregs of bitterness.

CHAPTER X.

1821—1824.

POLITICS—THE CARBONARI—EXPEDITION TO GREECE— DEATH.

IN leaving Venice for Ravenna, Byron passed from the society of gondoliers and successive sultanas to a comparatively domestic life, with a mistress who at least endeavoured to stimulate some of his higher aspirations, and smiled upon his wearing the sword along with the lyre. In the last episode of his constantly chequered and too voluptuous career, we have the waking of Sardanapalus realized in the transmutation of the fantastical Harold into a practical strategist, financier, and soldier. No one ever lived who, in the same space, more thoroughly ran the gauntlet of existence. Having exhausted all other sources of vitality and intoxication—travel, gallantry, and verse—it remained for the despairing poet to become a hero. But he was also moved by a public passion, the genuineness of which there is no reasonable ground to doubt. Like Alfieri and Rousseau, he had taken for his motto, "I am of the opposition;" and, as Dante under a republic called for a monarchy, Byron, under monarchies at home and abroad, called for a commonwealth. Amid the inconsistencies of his political sentiment, he had been consistent in so much love of liberty as led him to denounce oppression, even when he had no great faith

in the oppressed—whether English, or Italians, or Greeks.

Byron regarded the established dynasties of the continent with a sincere hatred. He talks of the “more than infernal tyranny” of the House of Austria. To his fancy, as to Shelley’s, New England is the star of the future. Attracted by a strength or rather force of character akin to his own, he worshipped Napoleon, even when driven to confess that “the hero had sunk into a king.” He lamented his overthrow; but, above all, that he was beaten by “three stupid, legitimate old dynasty boobies of regular sovereigns.” “I write in ipecacuanha that the Bourbons are restored.” “What right have we to prescribe laws to France? Here we are retrograding to the dull, stupid old system, balance of Europe—poising straws on kings’ noses, instead of wringing them off.” “The king-times are fast finishing. There will be blood shed like water, and tears like mist; but the peoples will conquer in the end. I shall not live to see it, but I foresee it.” “Give me a republic. Look in the history of the earth—Rome, Greece, Venice, Holland, France, America, our too short Commonwealth—and compare it with what they did under masters.”

His serious political verses are all in the strain of the lines on Wellington—

Never had mortal man such opportunity—
Except Napoleon—or abused it more;
You might have freed fallen Europe from the unity
Of tyrants, and been blessed from shore to shore.

An enthusiasm for Italy, which survived many disappointments, dictated some of the most impressive passages of his *Harold*, and inspired the *Lament of Tasso* and the

Ode on Venice. The *Prophecy of Dante* contains much that has since proved prophetic—

What is there wanting, then, to set thee free,
And show thy beauty in its fullest light ?
To make the Alps impassable ; and we,
Her sons, may do this with one deed—*Unite !*

His letters reiterate the same idea, in language even more emphatic. "It is no great matter, supposing that Italy could be liberated, who or what is sacrificed. It is a grand object—the very poetry of politics : only think—a free Italy !" Byron acted on his assertion that a man ought to do more for society than write verses. Mistrusting its leaders, and detesting the wretched lazzaroni, who "would have betrayed themselves and all the world," he yet threw himself heart and soul into the insurrection of 1820, saying, "Whatever I can do by money, means, or person, I will venture freely for their freedom." He joined the secret society of the Carbonari, wrote an address to the Liberal government set up in Naples, supplied arms and a refuge in his house, which he was prepared to convert into a fortress. In February, 1821, on the rout of the Neapolitans by the Austrians, the conspiracy was crushed. Byron, who "had always an idea that it would be bungled," expressed his fear that the country would be thrown back for 500 years into barbarism, and the Countess Guiccioli confessed with tears that the Italians must return to composing and strumming operatic airs. Carbonarism having collapsed, it of course made way for a reaction ; but the encouragement and countenance of the English poet and peer helped to keep alive the smouldering fire that Mazzini fanned into a flame, till Cavour turned it to a practical purpose, and the dreams of the idealists of 1820 were finally realized.

On the failure of the luckless conspiracy, Byron naturally betook himself to history, speculation, satire, and ideas of a journalistic propaganda; but all through, his mind was turning to the renewal of the action which was his destiny. "If I live ten years longer," he writes in 1822, "you will see that it is not all over with me. I don't mean in literature, for that is nothing—and I do not think it was my vocation; but I shall do something." The Greek war of liberation opened a new field for the exercise of his indomitable energy. This romantic struggle, begun in April, 1821, was carried on for two years with such remarkable success, that at the close of 1822 Greece was beginning to be recognized as an independent state: but in the following months the tide seemed to turn; dissensions broke out among the leaders, the spirit of intrigue seemed to stifle patriotism, and the energies of the insurgents were hampered for want of the sinews of war. There was a danger of the movement being starved out, and the committee of London sympathizers—of which the poet's intimate friend and frequent correspondent, Mr. Douglas Kinnaird, and Captain Blaquière, were leading promoters—was impressed with the necessity of procuring funds in support of the cause. With a view to this it seemed of consequence to attach to it some shining name, and men's thoughts almost inevitably turned to Byron. No other Englishman seemed so fit to be associated with the enterprise as the warlike poet, who had twelve years before linked his fame to that of "grey Marathon" and "Athena's tower," and, more recently immortalized the isles on which he cast so many a longing glance. Hobhouse broke the subject to him early in the spring of 1823: the committee opened communications in April. After hesitating through May, in June Byron consented to meet

Blaquière at Zante, and, on hearing the results of the captain's expedition to the Morea, to decide on future steps. His share in this enterprise has been assigned to purely personal and comparatively mean motives. He was, it is said, disgusted with his periodical, sick of his editor, tired of his mistress, and bent on any change, from China to Peru, that would give him a new theatre for display. One grows weary of the perpetual half-truths of inveterate detraction. It is granted that Byron was restless, vain, imperious, never did anything without a desire to shine in the doing of it, and was to a great degree the slave of circumstances. Had the *Liberal* proved a lamp to the nations, instead of a mere "red flag flaunted in the face of John Bull," he might have cast anchor at Genoa; but the whole drift of his work and life demonstrates that he was capable on occasion of merging himself in what he conceived to be great causes, especially in their evil days. Of the Hunts he may have had enough; but the invidious statement about La Guiccioli has no foundation, other than a somewhat random remark of Shelley, and the fact that he left her nothing in his will. It is distinctly ascertained that she expressly prohibited him from doing so; they continued to correspond to the last, and her affectionate, though unreadable, reminiscences, are sufficient proof that she at no time considered herself to be neglected, injured, or aggrieved.

Byron indeed left Italy in an unsettled state of mind: he spoke of returning in a few months, and as the period for his departure approached, became more and more irresolute. A presentiment of his death seemed to brood over a mind always superstitious, though never fanatical. Shortly before his own departure, the Blessingtons were preparing to leave Genoa for England. On the

evening of his farewell call he began to speak of his voyage with despondency, saying, "Here we are all now together; but when and where shall we meet again? I have a sort of boding that we see each other for the last time, as something tells me I shall never again return from Greece:" after which remark he leant his head on the sofa, and burst into one of his hysterical fits of tears. The next week was given to preparations for an expedition, which, entered on with mingled motives—sentimental, personal, public—became more real and earnest to Byron at every step he took. He knew all the vices of the "hereditary bondsmen" among whom he was going, and went among them, with yet unquenched aspirations, but with the bridle of discipline in his hand, resolved to pave the way towards the nation becoming better, by devoting himself to making it free.

On the morning of July 14th (1823) he embarked in the brig "Hercules," with Trelawny, Count Pietro Gamba, who remained with him to the last, Bruno a young Italian doctor, Scott the captain of the vessel, and eight servants, including Fletcher, besides the crew. They had on board two guns, with other arms and ammunition, five horses, an ample supply of medicines, with 50,000 Spanish dollars in coin and bills. The start was inauspicious. A violent squall drove them back to port, and in the course of a last ride with Gamba to Albaro, Byron asked, "Where shall we be in a year?" On the same day of the same month of 1824 he was carried to the tomb of his ancestors. They again set sail on the following evening, and in five days reached Leghorn, where the poet received a salutation in verse, addressed to him by Goethe, and replied to it. Here Mr. Hamilton Brown, a Scotch gentleman with considerable knowledge of

Greek affairs, joined the party, and induced them to change their course to Cephalonia, for the purpose of obtaining the advice and assistance of the English resident, Colonel Napier. The poet occupied himself during the voyage mainly in reading—among other books, Scott's *Life of Swift*, Grimm's *Correspondence*, La Rochefoucauld, and Las Casas—and watching the classic or historic shores which they skirted, especially noting Elba, Soracte, the Straits of Messina, and Etna. In passing Stromboli he said to Trelawny, "You will see this scene in a fifth canto of *Childe Harold*." On his companions suggesting that he should write some verses on the spot, he tried to do so, but threw them away, with the remark, "I cannot write poetry at will, as you smoke tobacco." Trelawny confesses that he was never on shipboard with a better companion, and that a severer test of good fellowship it is impossible to apply. Together they shot at gulls or empty bottles, and swam every morning in the sea. Early in August they reached their destination. Coming in sight of the Morea, the poet said to Trelawny, "I feel as if the eleven long years of bitterness I have passed through, since I was here, were taken from my shoulders, and I was scudding through the Greek Archipelago with old Bathurst in his frigate." Byron remained at or about Cephalonia till the close of the year. Not long after his arrival he made an excursion to Ithaca, and, visiting the monastery at Vathi, was received by the abbot with great ceremony, which, in a fit of irritation, brought on by a tiresome ride on a mule, he returned with unusual discourtesy; but next morning, on his giving a donation to their alms-box, he was dismissed with the blessing of the monks. "If this isle were mine," he declared on his way back, "I would break my staff and bury my book." A

little later, Brown and Trelawny being sent off with letters to the provisional government, the former returned with some Greek emissaries to London, to negotiate a loan; the latter attached himself to Odysseus, the chief of the republican party at Athens, and never again saw Byron alive. The poet, after spending a month on board the "*Hercules*," dismissed the vessel, and hired a house for Gamba and himself at Metaxata, a healthy village about four miles from the capital of the island. Meanwhile, Blaquièrè, neglecting his appointment at Zante, had gone to Corfu, and thence to England. Colonel Napier being absent from Cephalonia, Byron had some pleasant social intercourse with his deputy, but, unable to get from him any authoritative information, was left without advice, to be besieged by letters and messages from the factions. Among these there were brought to him hints that the Greeks wanted a king, and he is reported to have said, "If they make me the offer, I will perhaps not reject it."

The position would doubtless have been acceptable to a man who never—amid his many self-deceptions—affected to deny that he was ambitious: and who can say what might not have resulted for Greece, had the poet lived to add lustre to her crown? In the meantime, while faring more frugally than a day-labourer, he yet surrounded himself with a show of royal state, had his servants armed with gilt helmets, and gathered around him a body-guard of Suliotes. These wild mercenaries becoming turbulent, he was obliged to despatch them to Mesolonghi, then threatened with siege by the Turks and anxiously waiting relief. During his residence at Cephalonia, Byron was gratified by the interest evinced in him by the English residents. Among these the physician, Dr. Kennedy, a

worthy Scotchman, who imagined himself to be a theologian with a genius for conversion, was conducting a series of religious meetings at Argostoli, when the poet expressed a wish to be present at one of them. After listening, it is said, to a set of discourses that occupied the greater part of twelve hours, he seems, for one reason or another, to have felt called on to enter the lists, and found himself involved in the series of controversial dialogues afterwards published in a substantial book. This volume, interesting in several respects, is one of the most charming examples of unconscious irony in the language, and it is matter of regret that our space does not admit of the abridgment of several of its pages. They bear testimony, on the one hand, to Byron's capability of patience, and frequent sweetness of temper under trial; on the other, to Kennedy's utter want of humour, and to his courageous honesty. The curiously confronted interlocutors, in the course of the missionary and subsequent private meetings, ran over most of the ground debated between opponents and apologists of the Calvinistic faith, which Kennedy upheld without stint. The *Conversations* add little to what we already know of Byron's religious opinions; nor is it easy to say where he ceases to be serious and begins to banter, or vice versâ. He evidently wished to show that in argument he was good at fence, and could handle a theologian as skilfully as a foil. At the same time he wished if possible, though, as appears, in vain, to get some light on a subject with regard to which in his graver moods he was often exercised. On some points he is explicit. He makes an unequivocal protest against the doctrines of eternal punishment and infant damnation, saying that if the rest of mankind were to be damned,

he "would rather keep them company than creep into heaven alone." On questions of inspiration, and the deeper problems of human life, he is less distinct, being naturally inclined to a speculative necessitarianism, and disposed to admit original depravity; but he did not see his way out of the maze through the Atonement, and held that prayer had only significance as a devotional affection of the heart. Byron showed a remarkable familiarity with the Scriptures, and with parts of Barrow, Chillingworth, and Stillingfleet; but on Kennedy's lending for his edification Boston's *Fourfold State*, he returned it with the remark that it was too deep for him. On another occasion he said, "Do you know I am nearly reconciled to St. Paul, for he says there is no difference between the Jews and the Greeks? and I am exactly of the same opinion, for the character of both is equally vile." The good Scotchman's religious self-confidence is throughout free from intellectual pride; and his own confession, "This time I suspect his lordship had the best of it," might perhaps be applied to the whole discussion.

Critics who have little history and less war have been accustomed to attribute Byron's lingering at Cephalonia to indolence and indecision; they write as if he ought on landing on Greek soil to have put himself at the head of an army and stormed Constantinople. Those who know more, confess that the delay was deliberate, and that it was judicious. The Hellenic uprising was animated by the spirit of a "lion after slumber," but it had the heads of a Hydra hissing and tearing at one another. The chiefs who defended the country by their arms, compromised her by their arguments, and some of her best fighters were little better than pirates and bandits. Greece was a prey to factions—republican, monarchic, aristocratic—representing

naval, military, and territorial interests, and each beset by the adventurers who flock round every movement, only representing their own. During the first two years of success they were held in embryo ; during the later years of disaster, terminated by the allies at Navarino, they were buried ; during the interlude of Byron's residence, when the foes were like hounds in the leash, waiting for a renewal of the struggle, they were rampant. Had he joined any one of them he would have degraded himself to the level of a mere condottiere, and helped to betray the common cause. Beset by solicitations to go to Athens, to the Morea, to Acarnania, he resolutely held apart, biding his time, collecting information, making himself known as a man of affairs, endeavouring to conciliate rival clamants for pension or place, and carefully watching the tide of war. Numerous anecdotes of the period relate to acts of public or private benevolence, which endeared him to the population of the island ; but he was on the alert against being fleeced or robbed. " The bulk of the English," writes Colonel Napier, " came expecting to find the Peloponnesus filled with Plutarch's men, and returned thinking the inhabitants of Newgate more moral. Lord Byron judged the Greeks fairly, and knew that allowance must be made for emancipated slaves." Among other incidents we hear of his passing a group, who were " shrieking and howling as in Ireland " over some men buried in the fall of a bank ; he snatched a spade, began to dig, and threatened to horsewhip the peasants unless they followed his example. On November 30th he despatched to the central government a remarkable state paper, in which he dwells on the fatal calamity of a civil war, and says that unless union and order are established all hopes of a loan—which being every day more urgent,

he was in letters to England constantly pressing—are at an end. “I desire,” he concluded, “the wellbeing of Greece, and nothing else. I will do all I can to secure it; but I will never consent that the English public be deceived as to the real state of affairs. You have fought gloriously; act honourably towards your fellow-citizens and the world, and it will then no more be said, as has been repeated for two thousand years, with the Roman historians, that Philopœmen was the last of the Grecians.”

Prince Alexander Mavrocordatos—the most prominent of the practical patriotic leaders—having been deposed from the presidency, was sent to regulate the affairs of Western Greece, and was now on his way with a fleet to relieve Mesolonghi, in attempting which the brave Marco Bozzaris had previously fallen. In a letter, opening communication with a man for whom he always entertained a high esteem, Byron writes, “Colonel Stanhope has arrived from London, charged by our committee to act in concert with me. . . . Greece is at present placed between three measures—either to reconquer her liberty, to become a dependence of the sovereigns of Europe, or to return to a Turkish province. She has the choice only of these three alternatives. Civil war is but a road that leads to the two latter.”

At length the long looked-for fleet arrived, and the Turkish squadron, with the loss of a treasure-ship, retired up the Gulf of Lepanto. Mavrocordatos on entering Mesolonghi lost no time in inviting the poet to join him, and placed a brig at his disposal, adding, “I need not tell you to what a pitch your presence is desired by everybody, or what a prosperous direction

it will give to all our affairs. Your counsels will be listened to like oracles."

At the same date Stanhope writes, "The people in the streets are looking forward to his lordship's arrival as they would to the coming of the Messiah." Byron was unable to start in the ship sent for him; but in spite of medical warnings, a few days later, i.e. December 28th, he embarked in a small fast-sailing sloop called a *mistico*, while the servants and baggage were stowed in another and larger vessel under the charge of Count Gamba. From Gamba's graphic account of the voyage we may take the following:—"We sailed together till after ten at night; the wind favourable, a clear sky, the air fresh, but not sharp. Our sailors sang alternately patriotic songs, monotonous indeed, but to persons in our situation extremely touching, and we took part in them. We were all, but Lord Byron particularly, in excellent spirits. The *mistico* sailed the fastest. When the waves divided us, and our voices could no longer reach each other, we made signals by firing pistols and carbines. To-morrow we meet at Mesolonghi—to morrow. Thus, full of confidence and spirits, we sailed along. At twelve we were out of sight of each other."

Byron's vessel, separated from her consort, came into the close proximity of a Turkish frigate, and had to take refuge among the Scrofes' rocks. Emerging thence, he attained a small seaport of Acarnania, called Dragomestri, whence sallying forth on the 2nd of January under the convoy of some Greek gunboats, he was nearly wrecked. On the 4th Byron made, when violently heated, an imprudent plunge in the sea, and was never afterwards free from a pain in his bones. On the

5th he arrived at Mesolonghi, and was received with salvoes of musketry and music. Gamba was waiting him. His vessel, the "Bombarda," had been taken by the Ottoman frigate, but the captain of the latter, recognizing the Count as having formerly saved his life in the Black Sea, made interest in his behalf with Yussuf Pasha at Patras, and obtained his discharge. In recompense, the poet subsequently sent to the Pasha some Turkish prisoners, with a letter requesting him to endeavour to mitigate the inhumanities of the war. Byron brought to the Greeks at Mesolonghi the 4000*l.* of his personal loan (applied, in the first place, to defraying the expenses of the fleet), with the spell of his name and presence. He was shortly afterwards appointed to the command of the intended expedition against Lepanto, and, with this view, again took into his pay five hundred Suliotes. An approaching general assembly to organize the forces of the west, had brought together a motley crew, destitute, discontented, and more likely to wage war upon each other than on their enemies. Byron's closest associates during the ensuing months, were the engineer Parry, an energetic artilleryman, "extremely active, and of strong practical talents," who had travelled in America, and Colonel Stanhope (afterwards Lord Harrington) equally with himself devoted to the emancipation of Greece, but at variance about the means of achieving it. Stanhope, a moral enthusiast of the stamp of Kennedy, beset by the fallacy of religious missions, wished to cover the Morea with Wesleyan tracts, and liberate the country by the agency of the Press. He had imported a converted blacksmith, with a cargo of Bibles, types, and paper, who on 20*l.* a year, undertook to accomplish the reform. Byron, backed by the good sense



of Mavrocordatos, proposed to make cartridges of the tracts, and small shot of the type; he did not think that the turbulent tribes were ripe for freedom of the press, and had begun to regard Republicanism itself as a matter of secondary moment. The disputant allies in the common cause occupied each a flat of the same small house, the soldier by profession was bent on writing the Turks down, the poet on fighting them down, holding that "the work of the sword must precede that of the pen, and that camps must be the training schools of freedom." Their altercations were sometimes fierce—"Despot!" cried Stanhope, "after professing liberal principles from boyhood, you when called to act prove yourself a Turk." "Radical!" retorted Byron, "if I had held up my finger I could have crushed your press,"—but this did not prevent the recognition by each of them of the excellent qualities of the other.

Ultimately Stanhope went to Athens, and allied himself with Trelawny and Odysseus and the party of the Left. Nothing can be more statesmanlike than some of Byron's papers of this and the immediately preceding period; nothing more admirable than the spirit which inspires them. He had come into the heart of a revolution, exposed to the same perils as those which had wrecked the similar movement in Italy. Neither trusting too much nor distrusting too much, with a clear head and a good will he set about enforcing a series of excellent measures. From first to last he was engaged in denouncing dissension, in advocating unity, in doing everything that man could do to concentrate and utilize the disorderly elements with which he had to work. He occupied himself in repairing fortifications, managing ships, restraining licence, promoting courtesy between the foes, and regulating the disposal of the sinews of war.

On the morning of the 22nd of January, his last birthday, he came from his room to Stanhope's, and said, smiling, "You were complaining that I never write any poetry now," and read the familiar stanzas beginning—

'Tis time this heart should be unmoved,

and ending—

Seek out—less often sought than found—

A soldier's grave, for thee the best ;

Then look around, and choose thy ground,

And take thy rest.

High thoughts, high resolves ; but the brain that was overtasked, and the frame that was outworn, would be tasked and worn little longer. The lamp of a life that had burnt too fiercely was flickering to its close. "If we are not taken off with the sword," he writes on February 5th, "we are like to march off with an ague in this mud basket ; and, to conclude with a very bad pun, better *martially* than *marsh-ally*. The dykes of Holland when broken down are the deserts of Arabia, in comparison with Mesolonghi." In April, when it was too late, Stanhope wrote from Salona, in Phocis, imploring him not to sacrifice health, and perhaps life, "in that bog."

Byron's house stood in the midst of the exhalations of a muddy creek, and his natural irritability was increased by a more than usually long ascetic regimen. From the day of his arrival in Greece he discarded animal food and lived mainly on toast, vegetables, and cheese, olives and light wine, at the rate of forty paras a day. In spite of his strength of purpose, his temper was not always proof against the rapacity and turbulence by which he was surrounded. About the middle of February, when the artillery had been got into readiness for the attack on Lepanto

—the northern, as Patras was the southern, gate of the gulf, still in the hands of the Turks—the expedition was thrown back by the unexpected rising of the Suliotes. These peculiarly Irish Greeks, chronically seditious by nature, were on this occasion, as afterwards appeared, stirred up by emissaries of Colocatroni, who, though assuming the position of the rival of Mavrocordatos, was simply a brigand on a large scale in the Morea. Exasperation at this mutiny, and the vexation of having to abandon a cherished scheme, seem to have been the immediately provoking causes of a violent convulsive fit which, on the evening of the 15th, attacked the poet, and endangered his life. Next day he was better, but complained of weight in the head ; and the doctors applying leeches too close to the temporal artery, he was bled till he fainted. And now occurred the last of those striking incidents so frequent in his life, in reference to which we may quote the joint testimony of two witnesses. Colonel Stanhope writes, “Soon after his dreadful paroxysm, when he was lying on his sick-bed, with his whole nervous system completely shaken, the mutinous Suliotes, covered with dirt and splendid attires, broke into his apartment, brandishing their costly arms and loudly demanding their rights. Lord Byron, electrified by this unexpected act, seemed to recover from his sickness ; and the more the Suliotes raged, the more his calm courage triumphed. The scene was truly sublime.” “It is impossible,” says Count Gamba, “to do justice to the coolness and magnanimity which he displayed upon every trying occasion. Upon trifling occasions he was certainly irritable ; but the aspect of danger calmed him in an instant, and restored him the free exercise of all the powers of his noble nature. A more undaunted man in the hour of peril never breathed.”

A few days later, the riot being renewed, the disorderly crew were, on payment of their arrears, finally dismissed ; but several of the English artificers under Parry left about the same time, in fear of their lives.

On the 4th, the last of the long list of Byron's letters to Moore resents, with some bitterness, the hasty acceptance of a rumour that he had been quietly writing *Don Juan* in some Ionian island. At the same date he writes to Kennedy, "I am not unaware of the precarious state of my health. But it is proper I should remain in Greece, and it were better to die doing something than nothing." Visions of enlisting Europe and America on behalf of the establishment of a new state, that might in course of time develope itself over the realm of Alexander, floated and gleamed in his fancy ; but in his practical daily procedure the poet took as his text the motto "*festina lente*," insisted on solid ground under his feet, and had no notion of sailing balloons over the sea. With this view he discouraged Stanhope's philanthropic and propagandist paper, the *Telegrapho*, and disparaged Dr. Mayer, its Swiss editor, saying, "Of all petty tyrants he is one of the pettiest, as are most demagogues." Byron had none of the Slavonic leanings, and almost personal hatred of Ottoman rule, of some of our statesmen ; but he saw on what side lay the forces and the hopes of the future. "I cannot calculate," he said to Gamba, during one of their latest rides together, "to what a height Greece may rise. Hitherto it has been a subject for the hymns and elegies of fanatics and enthusiasts ; but now it will draw the attention of the politician. . . . At present there is little difference, in many respects, between Greeks and Turks, nor could there be ; but the latter

must, in the common course of events, decline in power ; and the former must as inevitably become better. . . . The English Government deceived itself at first in thinking it possible to maintain the Turkish Empire in its integrity ; but it cannot be done, that unwieldy mass is already putrified, and must dissolve. If anything like an equilibrium is to be upheld, Greece must be supported." These words have been well characterized as prophetic. During this time Byron rallied in health, and displayed much of his old spirit, vivacity, and humour, took part in such of his favourite amusements as circumstances admitted, fencing, shooting, riding, and playing with his pet dog Lion. The last of his recorded practical jokes is his rolling about cannon balls, and shaking the rafters, to frighten Parry in the room below with the dread of an earthquake.

Towards the close of the month, after being solicited to accompany Mavrocordatos, to share the governorship of the Morea, he made an appointment to meet Colonel Stanhope and Odysseus at Salona, but was prevented from keeping it by violent floods which blocked up the communication. On the 30th he was presented with the freedom of the city of Mesolonghi. On the 3rd of April he intervened to prevent an Italian private, guilty of theft, from being flogged by order of some German officers. On the 9th, exhilarated by a letter from Mrs. Leigh with good accounts of her own and Ada's health, he took a long ride with Gamba and a few of the remaining Suliotes, and after being violently heated, and then drenched in a heavy shower, persisted in returning home in a boat, remarking with a laugh, in answer to a remonstrance, "I should make a pretty soldier if I were to care for such a trifle." It soon became apparent that he had caught his death.

Almost immediately on his return, he was seized with shiverings and violent pain. The next day he rose as usual, and had his last ride in the olive woods. On the 11th a rheumatic fever set in. On the 14th, Bruno's skill being exhausted, it was proposed to call Dr. Thomas from Zante, but a hurricane prevented any ship being sent. On the 15th, another physician, Mr. Milligen, suggested bleeding to allay the fever, but Byron held out against it, quoting Dr. Reid to the effect that "less slaughter is effected by the lance than the lancet—that minute instrument of mighty mischief;" and saying to Bruno, "If my hour is come I shall die, whether I lose my blood or keep it." Next morning Milligen induced him to yield, by a suggestion of the possible loss of his reason. Throwing out his arm, he cried, "There! you are, I see, a d—d set of butchers. Take away as much blood as you like, and have done with it." The remedy, repeated on the following day with blistering, was either too late or ill-advised. On the 18th he saw more doctors, but was manifestly sinking, amid the tears and lamentations of attendants who could not understand each other's language. In his last hours his delirium bore him to the field of arms. He fancied he was leading the attack on Lepanto, and was heard exclaiming, "Forwards! forwards! follow me!" Who is not reminded of another death-bed, not remote in time from his, and the *Tête d'armée* of the great Emperor who with the great Poet divided the wonder of Europe? The stormy vision passed, and his thoughts reverted home. "Go to my sister," he faltered out to Fletcher; "tell her—go to Lady Byron—you will see her, and say"—nothing more could be heard but broken ejaculations: "Augusta—Ada—my sister, my child. Io lascio qualche cosa di caro nel mondo. For the

rest, I am content to die." At six on the evening of the 18th he uttered his last words, "Δεῖ με νῦν καθεύδειν;" and on the 19th he passed away.

Never perhaps was there such a national lamentation. By order of Mavrocordatos, thirty-seven guns—one for each year of the poet's life—were fired from the battery, and answered by the Turks from Patras with an exultant volley. All offices, tribunals, and shops were shut, and a general mourning for twenty-one days proclaimed. Stanhope wrote, on hearing the news, "England has lost her brightest genius—Greece her noblest friend;" and Trelawny, on coming to Mesolonghi, heard nothing in the streets but "Byron is dead!" like a bell tolling through the silence and the gloom. Intending contributors to the cause of Greece turned back when they heard the tidings, that seemed to them to mean she was headless. Her cities contended for the body, as of old for the birth of a poet. Athens wished him to rest in the Temple of Theseus. The funeral service was performed at Mesolonghi. But on the 2nd of May the embalmed remains left Zante, and on the 29th arrived in the Downs. His relatives applied for permission to have them interred in Westminster Abbey, but it was refused; and on the 16th July they were conveyed to the village church of Hucknall.

CHAPTER XI.

CHARACTERISTICS, AND PLACE IN LITERATURE.

LORD JEFFREY at the close of a once-famous review quaintly laments: "The tuneful quartos of Southey are already little better than lumber, and the rich melodies of Keats and Shelley, and the fantastical emphasis of Wordsworth, and the plebeian pathos of Crabbe, are melting fast from the field of our vision. The novels of Scott have put out his poetry, and the blazing star of Byron himself is receding from its place of pride." Of the poets of the early part of this century, Lord John Russell thought Byron the greatest, then Scott, then Moore. "Such an opinion," wrote a *National* reviewer, in 1860, "is not worth a refutation; we only smile at it." Nothing in the history of literature is more curious than the shifting of the standard of excellence, which so perplexes criticism. But the most remarkable feature of the matter is the frequent return to power of the once discarded potentates. Byron is resuming his place: his spirit has come again to our atmosphere; and every budding critic, as in 1820, is impelled to pronounce a verdict on his genius and character. The present times are, in many respects, an aftermath of the first quarter of the century, which was an era of revolt, of doubt, of storm. There succeeded an era of exhaustion, of quiescence, of reflection. The first years of the third quarter saw a

revival of turbulence and agitation ; and, more than our fathers, we are inclined to sympathize with our grand-fathers. Macaulay has popularized the story of the change of literary dynasty which in our island marked the close of the last, and the first two decades of the present, hundred years.

The corresponding artistic revolt on the continent was closely connected with changes in the political world. The originators of the romantic literature in Italy, for the most part, died in Spielberg or in exile. The same revolution which levelled the Bastille, and converted Versailles and the Trianon—the classic school in stone and terrace—into a moral Herculaneum and Pompeii, drove the models of the so-called Augustan ages into a museum of antiquarians. In our own country, the movement initiated by Chatterton, Cowper, and Burns, was carried out by two classes of great writers. They agreed in opposing freedom to formality ; in substituting for the old, new aims and methods ; in preferring a grain of mother wit to a peck of clerisy. They broke with the old school, as Protestantism broke with the old Church ; but, like the sects, they separated again. Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge, while refusing to acknowledge the literary precedents of the past, submitted themselves to a self-imposed law. The partialities of their maturity were towards things settled and regulated ; their favourite virtues, endurance and humility ; their conformity to established institutions was the basis of a new Conservatism. The others were the Radicals of the movement : they practically acknowledged no law but their own inspiration. Dissatisfied with the existing order, their sympathies were with strong will and passion and defiant independence. These found their master-types in Shelley and in Byron.

A reaction is always an extreme. Lollards, Puritans, Covenanters, were in some respects nauseous antidotes to ecclesiastical corruption. The ruins of the Scotch cathedrals and of the French nobility are warnings at once against the excess that provokes and the excess that avenges. The revolt against the *ancien régime* in letters made possible the Ode that is the high-tide mark of modern English inspiration, but it was parodied in page on page of maundering rusticity. Byron saw the danger, but was borne headlong by the rapids. Hence the anomalous contrast between his theories and his performance. Both Wordsworth and Byron were bitten by Rousseau; but the former is, at furthest, a Girondin. The latter, acting like Danton on the motto "*L'audace, l'audace, toujours l'audace*," sighs after *Henri Quatre et Gabriëlle*. There is more of the spirit of the French Revolution in *Don Juan* than in all the works of the author's contemporaries; but his criticism is that of Boileau, and when deliberate is generally absurd. He never recognized the meaning of the artistic movement of his age, and overvalued those of his works which the Unities helped to destroy. He hailed Gifford as his Magnus Apollo, and put Rogers next to Scott in his comical pyramid. "Chaucer," he writes, "I think obscene and contemptible." He could see no merit in Spenser, preferred Tasso to Milton, and called the old English dramatists "mad and turbid mountebanks." In the same spirit he writes: "In the time of Pope it was all Horace, now it is all Claudian." He saw—what fanatics had begun to deny—that Pope was a great writer, and the "angel of reasonableness," the strong common sense of both was a link between them; but the expressions he uses during his controversy with Bowles look

like jests, till we are convinced of his earnestness by his anger. "Neither time, nor distance, nor grief, nor age can ever diminish my veneration for him who is the great moral poet of all times, of all climes, of all feelings, and of all stages of existence. . . . Your whole generation are not worth a canto of the *Dunciad*, or anything that is his." All the while he was himself writing prose and verse, in grasp if not in vigour as far beyond the stretch of Pope, as Pope is in "worth and wit and sense" removed above his mimics. The point of the paradox is not merely that he deserted, but that he sometimes imitated his model, and when he did so, failed. Macaulay's judgment, that "personal taste led him to the eighteenth century, thirst for praise to the nineteenth," is quite at fault. There can be no doubt that Byron loved praise as much as he affected to despise it. His note, on reading the *Quarterly* on his dramas, "I am the most unpopular man in England," is like the cry of a child under chastisement; but he had little affinity, moral or artistic, with the spirit of our so-called Augustans, and his determination to admire them was itself rebellious. Again we are reminded of his phrase, "I am of the opposition." His vanity and pride were perpetually struggling for the mastery, and though he thirsted for popularity he was bent on compelling it; so he warred with the literary impulse of which he was the child.

Byron has no relation to the master-minds whose works reflect a nation or an era, and who keep their own secrets. His verse and prose is alike biographical, and the inequalities of his style are those of his career. He lived in a glass case, and could not hide himself by his habit of burning blue lights. He was too great to do violence to his nature, which was not great enough to be really con-

sistent. It was thus natural for him to pose as the spokesman of two ages—as a critic and as an author ; and of two orders of society—as a peer, and as a poet of revolt. Sincere in both, he could never forget the one character in the other. To the last, he was an aristocrat in sentiment, a democrat in opinion. “Vulgarity,” he writes with a pithy half-truth, “is far worse than downright black guardism ; for the latter comprehends wit, humour, and strong sense at times, while the former is a sad abortive attempt at all things, signifying nothing.” He could never reconcile himself to the English radicals ; and it has been acutely remarked, that part of his final interest in Greece lay in the fact that he found it a country of classic memories, “where a man might be the champion of liberty without soiling himself in the arena.” He owed much of his early influence to the fact of his moving in the circles of rank and fashion ; but though himself steeped in the prejudices of caste, he struck at them at times with fatal force. Aristocracy is the individual asserting a vital distinction between itself and “the muck o’ the world.” Byron’s heroes all rebel against the associative tendency of the nineteenth century ; they are self-worshippers at war with society ; but most of them come to bad ends. He maligned himself in those caricatures, and has given more of himself in describing one whom with special significance we call a brother poet. “Allen,” he writes in 1813, “has lent me a quantity of Burns’s unpublished letters. . . . What an antithetical mind !—tenderness, roughness—delicacy, coarseness—sentiment, sensuality—soaring and grovelling—dirt and deity—all mixed up in that one compound of inspired clay !” We have only to add to these antitheses, in applying them with slight modification to the writer.



Byron had, on occasion, more self-control than Burns, who yielded to every thirst or gust, and could never have lived the life of the soldier at Mesolonghi ; but partly owing to meanness, partly to a sound instinct, his memory has been more severely dealt with. The fact of his being a nobleman helped to make him famous, but it also helped to make him hated. No doubt it half spoiled him in making him a show ; and the circumstance has suggested the remark of a humourist, that it is as hard for a lord to be a perfect gentleman as for a camel to pass through the needle's eye. But it also exposed to the rancours of jealousy a man who had nearly everything but domestic happiness to excite that most corroding of literary passions ; and when he got out of gear he became the quarry of Spenser's "blatant beast." On the other hand, Burns was, beneath his disgust at Holy Fairs and Willies, sincerely reverential ; much of *Don Juan* would have seemed to him "an atheist's laugh," and—a more certain superiority—he was absolutely frank.

Byron, like Pope, was given to playing monkey-like tricks, mostly harmless, but offensive to their victims. His peace of mind was dependent on what people would say of him, to a degree unusual even in the irritable race ; and when they spoke ill he was, again like Pope, essentially vindictive. The *Bards and Reviewers* beats about, where the lines to Atticus transfix with Philoctetes' arrows ; but they are due to a like impulse. Byron affected to condemn the world ; but, say what he would, he cared too much for it. He had a genuine love of solitude as an alterative ; but he could not subsist without society, and, Shelley tells us, wherever he went, became the nucleus of it. He sprang up again when flung to the earth, but he never attained to the disdain he desired.

We find him at once munificent and careful about money ; calmly asleep amid a crowd of trembling sailors, yet never going to ride without a nervous caution ; defying augury, yet seriously disturbed by a gipsy's prattle. He could be the most genial of comrades, the most considerate of masters, and he secured the devotion of his servants, as of his friends ; but he was too overbearing to form many equal friendships, and apt to be ungenerous to his real rivals. His shifting attitude towards Lady Byron, his wavering purposes, his impulsive acts, are a part of the character we trace through all his life and work, —a strange mixture of magnanimity and brutality, of laughter and tears, consistent in nothing but his passion and his pride, yet redeeming all his defects by his graces, and wearing a greatness that his errors can only half obscure.

Alternately the idol and the horror of his contemporaries, Byron was, during his life, feared and respected as "the grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme." His works were the events of the literary world. The chief among them were translated into French, German, Italian, Danish, Polish, Russian, Spanish. On the publication of Moore's *Life*, Lord Macaulay had no hesitation in referring to Byron as "the most celebrated Englishman of the nineteenth century." Nor have we now ; but in the interval between 1840—1870, it was the fashion to talk of him as a sentimentalist, a romancer, a shallow wit, a nine days' wonder, a poet for "green unknowing youth." It was a reaction, such as leads us to disestablish the heroes of our crude imaginations till we learn that to admire nothing is as sure a sign of immaturity as to admire everything.

The weariness, if not disgust, induced by a throng of

more than usually absurd imitators, enabled Carlyle, the poet's successor in literary influence (followed with even greater unfairness by Thackeray), more effectively to lead the counter-revolt. "In my mind," writes the former, in 1839, "Byron has been sinking at an accelerated rate for the last ten years, and has now reached a very low level. . . . His fame has been very great, but I do not see how it is to endure; neither does that make him great. No genuine productive thought was ever revealed by him to mankind. He taught me nothing that I had not again to forget." The refrain of Carlyle's advice during the most active years of his criticism was, "Close thy Byron, open thy Goethe." We do so, and find that the refrain of Goethe's advice in reference to Byron is—"nocturnâ versate manu, versate diurnâ." He urged Eckermann to study English that he might read him; remarking, "A character of such eminence has never existed before, and probably will never come again. The beauty of *Cain* is such as we shall not see a second time in the world. . . . Byron issues from the sea-waves ever fresh. In *Helena*, I could not make use of any man as the representative of the modern poetic era except him, who is undoubtedly the greatest genius¹ of our century." Again: "Tasso's epic has maintained its fame, but Byron is the burning bush, which reduces the cedar of Lebanon to ashes. . . . The English may think of him as they please; this is certain, they can show no (living) poet who is comparable to him. . . . But he is too worldly. Contrast *Macbeth*, and *Beppo*, where you are in a nefarious empirical world." On Eckermann's doubting "whether there is a gain for pure culture in Byron's work," Goethe conclusively replies, "There I must contradict you. The audacity and

¹ Mr. Arnold wrongly objects to this translation of the German "talent."

grandeur of Byron must certainly tend towards culture. We should take care not to be always looking for it in the decidedly pure and moral. Everything that is great promotes cultivation, as soon as we are aware of it."

This verdict of the Olympian as against the verdict of the Titan is interesting in itself, and as being the verdict of the whole continental world of letters. "What," exclaims Castelar, "does Spain not owe to Byron? From his mouth come our hopes and fears. He has baptized us with his blood. There is no one with whose being some song of his is not woven. His life is like a funeral torch over our graves." Mazzini takes up the same tune for Italy. Stendhal speaks of Byron's "Apollonic power;" and Sainte Beuve writes to the same intent, with some judicious caveats. M. Taine concludes his survey of the romantic movement with the remark: "In this splendid effort, the greatest are exhausted. One alone—Byron—attains the summit. He is so great and so English, that from him alone we shall learn more truths of his country and his age than from all the rest together." Dr. Elze, ranks the author of *Harold* and *Juan* among the four greatest English poets, and claims for him the intellectual parentage of Lamartine and Musset in France, of Espronceda in Spain, of Puschkin in Russia, with some modifications, of Heine in Germany, of Berchet and others in Italy. So many voices of so various countries cannot be simply set aside: unless we wrap ourselves in an insolent insularism, we are bound at least to ask what is the meaning of their concurrent testimony. Foreign judgments can manifestly have little weight on matters of form, and not one of the above-mentioned critics is sufficiently alive to the egregious

shortcomings which Byron himself recognized. That he loses almost nothing by translation is a compliment to the man, a disparagement to the artist. Very few pages of his verse even aspire to perfection; hardly a stanza will bear the minute word-by-word dissection which only brings into clearer view the delicate touches of Keats or Tennyson; his pictures with a big brush were never meant for the microscope. Here the contrast between his theoretic worship of his idol and his own practice reaches a climax. If, as he professed to believe, "the best poet is he who best executes his work," then he is hardly a poet at all. He is habitually rapid and slovenly; an improvisatore on the spot where his fancy is kindled, writing *currente calamo*, and disdaining the "art to blot." "I can never recast anything. I am like the tiger; if I miss the first spring, I go grumbling back to my jungle." He said to Medwin, "Blank verse is the most difficult, because every line must be good." Consequently, his own blank verse is always defective—sometimes execrable. No one else—except, perhaps, Wordsworth—who could write so well, could also write so ill. This fact in Byron's case seems due not to mere carelessness, but to incapacity. Something seems to stand behind him, like the slave in the chariot, to check the current of his highest thought. The glow of his fancy fades with the suddenness of a southern sunset. His best inspirations are spoilt by the interruption of incongruous commonplace. He had none of the guardian delicacy of taste, or the thirst after completeness, which mark the consummate artist. He is more nearly a dwarf Shakespeare than a giant Pope. This defect was most mischievous where he was weakest, in his dramas and his lyrics, least so where he was strongest, in his mature satires. It is almost trans-

muted into an excellence in the greatest of these, which is by design and in detail a temple of incongruity.

If we turn from his manner to his matter, we cannot claim for Byron any absolute originality. His sources have been found in Rousseau, Voltaire, Chateaubriand, Beaumarchais, Lauzun, Gibbon, Bayle, St. Pierre, Alfieri, Casti, Cuvier, La Bruyere, Wieland, Swift, Sterne, Le Sage, Goethe, scraps of the classics, and the Book of Job. Absolute originality in a late age is only possible to the hermit, the lunatic, or the sensation novelist. Byron, like the rovers before Minos, was not ashamed of his piracy. He transferred the random prose of his own letters and journals to his dramas, and with the same complacency made use of the notes jotted down from other writers as he sailed on the Lake of Geneva. But he made them his own by smelting the rough ore into bell metal. He brewed a cauldron like that of Macbeth's witches, and from it arose the images of crowned kings. If he did not bring a new idea into the world, he quadrupled the force of existing ideas and scattered them far and wide. Southern critics have maintained that he had a southern nature and was in his true element on the Lido or under an Andalusian night. Others dwell on the English pride that went along with his Italian habits and Greek sympathies. The truth is, he had the power of making himself poetically everywhere at home; and this, along with the fact of all his writings being perfectly intelligible, is the secret of his European influence. He was a citizen of the world; because he not only painted the environs, but reflected the passions and aspirations of every scene amid which he dwelt.

A disparaging critic has said, "Byron is nothing without his descriptions." The remark only emphasizes the

fact that his genius was not dramatic. All non-dramatic art is concerned with bringing before us pictures of the world, the value of which lies half in their truth, half in the amount of human interest with which they are invested. To scientific accuracy few poets can lay claim, and Byron less than most ; but the general truth of his descriptions is acknowledged by all who have travelled in the same countries. The Greek verses of his first pilgrimage,—e.g. the night scene on the Gulf of Arta, many of the Albanian sketches, with much of the *Siege of Corinth* and the *Giaour*—have been invariably commended for their vivid realism. Attention has been especially directed to the lines in the *Corsair* beginning—

But, lo! from high Hymettus to the plain,

as being the veritable voice of one

Spell-bound, within the clustering Cyclades.

The opening lines of the same canto, transplanted from the *Curse of Minerva*, are even more suggestive :—

Slow sinks, more lovely ere his race be run,
Along Morea's hill the setting sun,
Not, as in northern climes, obscurely bright,
But one unclouded blaze of living light, &c.

In the same way, the later cantos of *Harold* are steeped in Switzerland and in Italy. Byron's genius, it is true, required a stimulus ; it could not have revelled among the daisies of Chaucer, or pastured by the banks of the Doon or the Ouse, or thriven among the Lincolnshire fens. He had a sincere, if somewhat exclusive, delight in the storms and crags that seemed to respond to his nature and to his age. There is no affectation in the expression of the wish, "O that the desert were my dwelling-place!"

though we know that the writer on the shores of the Mediterranean still craved for the gossip of the clubs. It only shows that—

Two desires toss about
The poet's feverish blood ;
One drives him to the world without,
And one to solitude.

Of Byron's two contemporary rivals, Wordsworth had no feverish blood ; nothing drove him to the world without ; consequently his "eyes avert their ken from half of human fate," and his influence, though perennial, will always be limited. He conquered England from his hills and lakes ; but his spirit has never crossed the Straits which he thought too narrow. The other, with a fever in his veins, calmed it in the sea and in the cloud, and, in some degree because of his very excellencies, has failed as yet to mark the world at large. The poets' poet, the cynosure of enthusiasts, he bore the banner of the forlorn hope ; but Byron, with his feet of clay, led the ranks. Shelley, as pure a philanthropist as St. Francis or Howard, could forget mankind, and, like his Adonais, become one with nature. Byron, who professed to hate his fellows, was of them even more than for them, and so appealed to them through a broader sympathy, and held them with a firmer hand. By virtue of his passion, as well as his power, he was enabled to represent the human tragedy in which he played so many parts, and to which his external universe of cloudless moons, and vales of evergreen, and lightning-riven peaks, are but the various background. He set the "anguish, doubt, desire," the whole chaos of his age, to a music whose thunder-roll seems to have inspired the opera of *Lohengrin*—a music not designed to teach or to satisfy "the budge doctors of

the Stoic fur," but which will continue to arouse and delight the sons and daughters of men.

Madame de Staël said to Byron, at Ouchy, "It does not do to war with the world: the world is too strong for the individual." Goethe only gives a more philosophic form to this counsel when he remarks of the poet, "He put himself into a false position by his assaults on Church and State. His discontent ends in negation. . . . If I call *bad* bad, what do I gain? But if I call *good* bad, I do mischief." The answer is obvious: as long as men call *bad* good, there is a call for iconoclasts: half the reforms of the world have begun in negation. Such comments also point to the common error of trying to make men other than they are by lecturing them. This scion of a long line of lawless bloods—a Scandinavian Berserker, if there ever was one—the literary heir of the Eddas—was specially created to wage that war—to smite the conventionality which is the tyrant of England with the hammer of Thor, and to sear with the sarcasm of Mephistopheles the hollow hypocrisy—sham taste, sham morals, sham religion—of the society by which he was surrounded and infected, and which all but succeeded in seducing him. But for the ethereal essence,—

The fount of fiery life
Which served for that Titanic strife,

Byron would have been merely a more melodious Moore and a more accomplished Brummell. But the caged lion was only half tamed, and his continual growls were his redemption. His restlessness was the sign of a yet unbroken will. He fell and rose, and fell again; but never gave up the struggle that keeps alive, if it does not save, the soul. His greatness as well as his weakness lay, in the fact that from boyhood battle was the breath of his being. To tell

him not to fight, was like telling Wordsworth not to reflect, or Shelley not to sing. His instrument is a trumpet of challenge ; and he lived, as he appropriately died, in the progress of an unaccomplished campaign. His work is neither perfect architecture nor fine mosaic ; but, like that of his intellectual ancestors, the elder Elizabethans whom he perversely maligned, it is all animated by the spirit of action and of enterprise.

In good portraits his head has a lurid look, as if it had been at a higher temperature than that of other men. That high temperature was the source of his inspiration, and the secret of a spell which, during his life, commanded homage and drew forth love. Mere artists are often mannikins. Byron's brilliant though unequal genius was subordinate to the power of his personality ; he

Had the elements
So mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world—"This was a man."

We may learn much from him still, when we have ceased to disparage, as our fathers ceased to idolize, a name in which there is so much warning and so much example.

THE END

English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

SHELLEY



S H E L L E Y

BY

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS

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PREFACE.

THIS sketch of Shelley's life was written in the summer of 1878. Since then Professor Dowden's *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (2 vols., Kegan Paul, Trench, and Co., 1886) has been given to the world. In that exhaustive work many important documents belonging to the poet's heirs have been freely used for the first time. Professor Dowden has thus been able to elucidate some hitherto obscure points in Shelley's history, and to settle several doubtful questions. It is not probable that much more will be added in the future to our knowledge of his life.

Upon the appearance of Professor Dowden's biography, I was anxious to rewrite those portions of my book which required modification by the light of authentic papers now at length communicated to the public. My references to the Shelley archives (pp. 81 and 83) in particular required correction.

This, however, would have involved a disproportionate derangement of the stereotype plates. I am therefore obliged to content myself with minor alterations. These are of three kinds. In the

present volume I have introduced such verbal changes as could be made upon the plates. I have also enclosed some passages in brackets, indicating thereby that I should prefer to omit these altogether. Finally, I have recast the narrative of Shelley's separation from his first wife (pp. 79-83), and have placed this in an Appendix, to which I earnestly call the attention of my readers.

JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS.

DAVOS PLATZ, *February* 1887.

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SHELLEY.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD.

It is worse than useless to deplore the irremediable ; yet no man, probably, has failed to mourn the fate of mighty poets, whose dawning gave the promise of a glorious day, but who passed from earth while yet the light that shone in them was crescent. That the world should know Marlowe and Giorgione, Raphael and Mozart, only by the products of their early manhood, is indeed a cause for lamentation, when we remember what the long lives of a Bach and Titian, a Michelangelo and Goethe, held in reserve for their maturity and age. It is of no use to persuade ourselves, as some have done, that we possess the best work of men untimely slain. Had Sophocles been cut off in his prime, before the composition of *Œdipus* ; had Handel never merged the fame of his forgotten operas in the immortal music of his oratorios ; had Milton been known only by the poems of his youth, we might with equal plausibility have laid that flattering unction to our heart. And yet how shallow would have been our optimism, how fallacious our attempt at consolation. There is no denying

the fact that when a young Marcellus is shown by fate for one brief moment, and withdrawn before his spring-time has brought forth the fruits of summer, we must bow in silence to the law of waste that rules inscrutably in nature.

Such reflections are forced upon us by the lives of three great English poets of this century. Byron died when he was thirty-six, Keats when he was twenty-five, and Shelley when he was on the point of completing his thirtieth year. Of the three, Keats enjoyed the briefest space for the development of his extraordinary powers. His achievement, perfect as it is in some poetic qualities, remains so immature and incomplete that no conjecture can be hazarded about his future. Byron lived longer and produced more than his brother poets. Yet he was extinguished when his genius was still ascendant, when his "swift and fair creations" were issuing like worlds from an archangel's hands. In his case we have perhaps only to deplore the loss of masterpieces that might have equalled, but could scarcely have surpassed, what we possess. Shelley's early death is more to be regretted. Unlike Keats and Byron he died by a mere accident. His faculties were far more complex, and his aims were more ambitious than theirs. He therefore needed length of years for their co-ordination; and if a fuller life had been allotted him, we have the certainty that from the discords of his youth he would have wrought a clear and lucid harmony.

These sentences form a somewhat gloomy prelude to a biography. Yet the student of Shelley's life, the sincere admirer of his genius, is almost forced to strike a solemn key-note at the outset. We are not concerned with one whose "little world of man" for good or ill, was perfected, but with one whose growth was interrupted just before

the synthesis of which his powers were capable, had been accomplished.

August 4, 1792, is one of the most memorable dates in the history of English literature. On this day Percy Bysshe Shelley was born at Field Place, near Horsham, in the county of Sussex. His father, named Timothy, was the eldest son of Bysshe Shelley, Esquire, of Goring Castle, in the same county. The Shelley family could boast of great antiquity and considerable wealth. Without reckoning earlier and semi-legendary honours, it may here be recorded that it is distinguished in the elder branch by one baronetcy dating from 1611, and by a second in the younger dating from 1806. In the latter year the poet's grandfather received this honour through the influence of his friend the Duke of Norfolk. Mr. Timothy Shelley was born in the year 1753, and in 1791 he married Elizabeth, daughter of Charles Pilfold, Esquire, a lady of great beauty, and endowed with fair intellectual ability, though not of a literary temperament. The first child of this marriage was the poet, named Bysshe in compliment to his grandfather, the then living head of the family, and Percy because of some remote connexion with the ducal house of Northumberland. Four daughters, Elizabeth, Mary, Hellen, and Margaret, and one son, John, who died in the year 1866, were the subsequent issue of Mr. Timothy Shelley's marriage. In the year 1815, upon the death of his father, he succeeded to the baronetcy, which passed, after his own death, to his grandson, the present Sir Percy Florence Shelley, as the poet's only surviving son.

Before quitting, once and for all, the arid region of genealogy, it may be worth mentioning that Sir Bysshe Shelley by his second marriage with Miss Elizabeth Jane

Sydney Perry, heiress of Penshurst, became the father of five children, the eldest son of whom assumed the name of Shelley-Sidney, received a baronetcy, and left a son, Philip Charles Sidney, who was created Lord De l'Isle and Dudley. Such details are not without a certain value, inasmuch as they prove that the poet, who won for his ancient and honourable house a fame far more illustrious than titles can confer, was sprung from a man of no small personal force and worldly greatness. Sir Bysshe Shelley owed his position in society, the wealth he accumulated, and the honours he transmitted to two families, wholly and entirely to his own exertions. Though he bore a name already distinguished in the annals of the English landed gentry, he had to make his own fortune under conditions of some difficulty. He was born in North America, and began life, it is said, as a quack doctor. There is also a legend of his having made a first marriage with a person of obscure birth in America. Yet such was the charm of his address, the beauty of his person, the dignity of his bearing, and the vigour of his will, that he succeeded in winning the hands and fortunes of two English heiresses; and, having begun the world with nothing, he left it at the age of seventy-four, bequeathing 300,000*l.* in the English Funds, together with estates worth 20,000*l.* a year to his descendants.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was therefore born in the purple of the English squirearchy; but never assuredly did the old tale of the swan hatched with the hen's brood of ducklings receive a more emphatic illustration than in this case. Gifted with the untameable individuality of genius, and bent on piercing to the very truth beneath all shams and fictions woven by society and ancient usage, he was driven by the circumstances of his birth and his surroundings

into an exaggerated warfare with the world's opinion.
His too frequent tirades against—

The Queen of Slaves,
The hood-winked Angel of the blind and dead,
Custom,—

owed much of their asperity to the early influences brought to bear upon him by relatives who prized their position in society, their wealth, and the observance of conventional decencies, above all other things.

Mr. Timothy Shelley was not what the world calls a bad man ; but he was everything which the poet's father ought not to have been. As member for the borough of Shoreham, he voted blindly with his party ; and that party looked to nothing beyond the interests of the gentry and the pleasure of the Duke of Norfolk. His philosophy was limited to a superficial imitation of Lord Chesterfield, whose style he pretended to affect in his familiar correspondence, though his letters show that he lacked the rudiments alike of logic and of grammar. His religious opinions might be summed up in Clough's epigram :—

At church on Sunday to attend
Will serve to keep the world your friend.

His morality in like manner was purely conventional, as may be gathered from his telling his eldest son that he would never pardon a *mésalliance*, but would provide for as many illegitimate children as he chose to have. For the rest, he appears to have been a fairly good landlord, and a not unkind father, sociable and hospitable, somewhat vain and occasionally odd in manner, but qualified for passing muster with the country gentlemen around him. In the capacity to understand a nature which deviated from the

ordinary type so remarkably as Shelley's, he was utterly deficient; and perhaps we ought to regard it as his misfortune that fate made him the father of a man who was among the greatest portents of originality and unconventionality that this century has seen. Toward an ordinary English youth, ready to sow his wild oats at college, and willing to settle at the proper age and take his place upon the bench of magistrates, Sir Timothy Shelley would have shown himself an indulgent father; and it must be conceded by the poet's biographer that if Percy Bysshe had but displayed tact and consideration on his side, many of the misfortunes which signalized his relations to his father would have been avoided.

Shelley passed his childhood at Field Place, and when he was about six years old began to be taught, together with his sisters, by Mr. Edwards, a clergyman who lived at Warnham. What is recorded of these early years we owe to the invaluable communications of his sister Hellen. The difference of age between her and her brother Bysshe obliges us to refer her recollections to a somewhat later period—probably to the holidays he spent away from Sion House and Eton. Still, since they introduce us to the domestic life of his then loved home, it may be proper to make quotations from them in this place. Miss Shelley tells us that her brother "would frequently come to the nursery, and was full of a peculiar kind of pranks. One piece of mischief, for which he was rebuked, was running a stick through the ceiling of a low passage to find some new chamber, which could be made effective for some flights of his vivid imagination." He was very much attached to his sisters, and used to entertain them with stories, in which "an alchemist, old and grey, with a long beard," who was supposed to abide mysteriously in

the garret of Field Place, played a prominent part. "Another favourite theme was the 'Great Tortoise,' that lived in Warnham Pond; and any unwonted noise was accounted for by the presence of this great beast, which was made into the fanciful proportions most adapted to excite awe and wonder." To his friend Hogg, in after-years, Shelley often spoke about another reptile, no mere creature of myth or fable, the "Old Snake," who had inhabited the gardens of Field Place for several generations. This venerable serpent was accidentally killed by the gardener's scythe; but he lived long in the poet's memory, and it may reasonably be conjectured that Shelley's peculiar sympathy for snakes was due to the dim recollection of his childhood's favourite. Some of the games he invented to please his sisters were grotesque, and some both perilous and terrifying. "We dressed ourselves in strange costumes to personate spirits or fiends, and Bysshe would take a fire-stove and fill it with some inflammable liquid and carry it flaming into the kitchen and to the back door." Shelley often took his sisters for long country rambles over hedge and fence, carrying them when the difficulties of the ground or their fatigue required it. At this time "his figure was slight and beautiful,—his hands were models, and his feet are treading the earth again in one of his race; his eyes too have descended in their wild fixed beauty to the same person. As a child, I have heard that his skin was like snow, and bright ringlets covered his head." Here is a little picture which brings the boy vividly before our eyes: "Bysshe ordered clothes according to his own fancy at Eton, and the beautifully fitting silk pantaloons, as he stood as almost all men and boys do, with their coat-tails near the fire, excited my silent though excessive admiration."

When he was ten years of age, Shelley went to school at Sion House, Brentford, an academy kept by Dr. Greenlaw, and frequented by the sons of London tradesmen, who proved but uncongenial companions to his gentle spirit. It is fortunate for posterity that one of his biographers, his second cousin Captain Medwin, was his schoolfellow at Sion House; for to his recollections we owe some details of great value. Medwin tells us that Shelley learned the classic languages almost by intuition, while he seemed to be spending his time in dreaming, now watching the clouds as they sailed across the school-room window, and now scribbling sketches of fir-trees and cedars in memory of Field Place. At this time he was subject to sleep-walking, and, if we may credit this biographer, he often lost himself in reveries not far removed from trance. His favourite amusement was novel-reading; and to the many "blue books" from the Minerva press devoured by him in his boyhood, we may ascribe the style and tone of his first compositions. For physical sports he showed no inclination. "He passed among his schoolfellows as a strange and unsocial being; for when a holiday relieved us from our tasks, and the other boys were engaged in such sports as the narrow limits of our prison-court allowed, Shelley, who entered into none of them, would pace backwards and forwards—I think I see him now—along the southern wall, indulging in various vague and undefined ideas, the chaotic elements, if I may say so, of what afterwards produced so beautiful a world."

Two of Shelley's most important biographical compositions undoubtedly refer to this period of his boyhood. The first is the passage in the *Prelude to Laon and Cythna* which describes his suffering among the unsympathetic inmates of a school—

Thoughts of great deeds were mine, dear Friend, when first
The clouds which wrap this world from youth did pass.
I do remember well the hour which burst
My spirit's sleep : a fresh May-dawn it was,
When I walked forth upon the glittering grass,
And wept, I knew not why ; until there rose
From the near school-room, voices, that, alas !
Were but one echo from a world of woes—
The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes.

And then I clasped my hands and looked around—
—But none was near to mock my streaming eyes,
Which poured their warm drops on the sunny ground—
So without shame I spake :—" I will be wise,
And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies
Such power, for I grow weary to behold
The selfish and the strong still tyrannize
Without reproach or check." I then controlled
My tears, my heart grew calm, and I was meek and bold.

And from that hour did I with earnest thought
Heap knowledge from forbidden mines of lore,
Yet nothing that my tyrants knew or taught
I cared to learn, but from that secret store
Wrought linked armour for my soul, before
It might walk forth to war among mankind.
Thus power and hope were strengthened more and more
Within me, till there came upon my mind
A sense of loneliness, a thirst with which I pined.

The second is a fragment on friendship preserved by Hogg. After defining that kind of passionate attachment which often precedes love in fervent natures, he proceeds : " I remember forming an attachment of this kind at school. I cannot recall to my memory the precise epoch at which this took place ; but I imagine it must have been at the age of eleven or twelve. The object of these sentiments was a boy about my own age, of a character eminently generous, brave, and gentle ; and the elements

of human feeling seemed to have been, from his birth, genially compounded within him. There was a delicacy and a simplicity in his manners, inexpressibly attractive. It has never been my fortune to meet with him since my school-boy days; but either I confound my present recollections with the delusions of past feelings, or he is now a source of honour and utility to every one around him. The tones of his voice were so soft and winning, that every word pierced into my heart; and their pathos was so deep, that in listening to him the tears have involuntarily gushed from my eyes. Such was the being for whom I first experienced the sacred sentiments of friendship." How profound was the impression made on his imagination and his feelings by this early friendship, may again be gathered from a passage in his note upon the antique group of Bacchus and Ampelus at Florence. "Look, the figures are walking with a sauntering and idle pace, and talking to each other as they walk, as you may have seen a younger and an elder boy at school, walking in some grassy spot of the play-ground with that tender friendship for each other which the age inspires."

These extracts prove beyond all question that the first contact with the outer world called into activity two of Shelley's strongest moral qualities—his hatred of tyranny and brutal force in any form, and his profound sentiment of friendship. The admiring love of women, which marked him no less strongly, and which made him second only to Shakespere in the sympathetic delineation of a noble feminine ideal, had been already developed by his deep affection for his mother and sisters. It is said that he could not receive a letter from them without manifest joy.

"Shelley," says Medwin, "was at this time tall for his

age, lightly and delicately built, and rather narrow-chested, with a complexion fair and ruddy, a face rather long than oval. His features, not regularly handsome, were set off by a profusion of silky brown hair, that curled naturally. The expression of his countenance was one of exceeding sweetness and innocence. His blue eyes were very large and prominent. They were at times, when he was abstracted, as he often was in contemplation, dull, and as it were, insensible to external objects; at others they flashed with the fire of intelligence. His voice was soft and low, but broken in its tones,—when anything much interested him, harsh and immodulated; and this peculiarity he never lost. He was naturally calm, but when he heard of or read of some flagrant act of injustice, oppression, or cruelty, then indeed the sharpest marks of horror and indignation were visible in his countenance."

Such as the child was, we shall find the man to have remained unaltered through the short space of life allowed him. Loving, innocent, sensitive, secluded from the vulgar concerns of his companions, strongly moralized after a peculiar and inborn type of excellence, drawing his inspirations from Nature and from his own soul in solitude, Shelley passed across the stage of this world, attended by a splendid vision which sustained him at a perilous height above the kindly race of men. The penalty of this isolation he suffered in many painful episodes. The reward he reaped in a measure of more authentic prophecy, and in a nobler realization of his best self, than could be claimed by any of his immediate contemporaries.

CHAPTER II.

ETON AND OXFORD.

IN 1804 Shelley went from Sion House to Eton. At this time Dr. Goodall was headmaster, and Shelley's tutor was a Mr. Bethel, "one of the dullest men in the establishment." At Eton Shelley was not popular either with his teachers or his elder school-fellows, although the boys of his own age are said to have adored him. "He was all passion," writes Mrs. Shelley, "passionate in his resistance to an injury, passionate in his love;" and this vehemence of temperament he displayed by organizing a rebellion against fagging, which no doubt won for him the applause of his juniors and equals. It was not to be expected that a lad intolerant of rule and disregarding of restriction, who neglected punctuality in the performance of his exercises, while he spent his leisure in translating half of Pliny's history, should win the approbation of pedagogues. At the same time the inspired opponent of the fagging system, the scorner of games and muscular amusements, could not hope to find much favour with such martinets of juvenile convention as a public school is wont to breed. At Eton, as elsewhere, Shelley's uncompromising spirit brought him into inconvenient contact with a world of vulgar usage, while his lively fancy invested the commonplaces of reality with dark hues



borrowed from his own imagination. Mrs. Shelley says of him, "Tamed by affection, but unconquered by blows, what chance was there that Shelley should be happy at a public school?" This sentence probably contains the pith of what he afterwards remembered of his own school life, and there is no doubt that a nature like his, at once loving and high-spirited, had much to suffer. It was a mistake, however, to suppose that at Eton there were any serious blows to bear, or to assume that laws of love which might have led a spirit so gentle as Shelley's, were adapted to the common stuff of which the English boy is formed. The latter mistake Shelley made continually throughout his youth; and only the advance of years tempered his passionate enthusiasm into a sober zeal for the improvement of mankind by rational methods. We may also trace at this early epoch of his life that untamed intellectual ambition—that neglect of the immediate and detailed for the transcendental and universal—which was a marked characteristic of his genius, leading him to fly at the highest while he overleaped the facts of ordinary human life. "From his earliest years," says Mrs. Shelley, "all his amusements and occupations were of a daring, and in one sense of the term, lawless nature. He delighted to exert his powers, not as a boy, but as a man; and so with manly powers and childish wit, he dared and achieved attempts that none of his comrades could even have conceived. His understanding and the early development of imagination never permitted him to mingle in childish plays; and his natural aversion to tyranny prevented him from paying due attention to his school duties. But he was always actively employed; and although his endeavours were prosecuted with puerile precipitancy, yet his aim and thoughts were constantly

directed to those great objects which have employed the thoughts of the greatest among men ; and though his studies were not followed up according to school discipline, they were not the less diligently applied to." This high-soaring ambition was the source both of his weakness and his strength in art, as well as in his commerce with the world of men. The boy who despised discipline and sought to extort her secrets from nature by magic, was destined to become the philanthropist who dreamed of revolutionizing society by eloquence, and the poet who invented in *Prometheus Unbound* forms of grandeur too colossal to be animated with dramatic life.

A strong interest in experimental science had been already excited in him at Sion House by the exhibition of an orrery ; and this interest grew into a passion at Eton. Experiments in chemistry and electricity, of the simpler and more striking kind, gave him intense pleasure—the more so perhaps because they were forbidden. On one occasion he set the trunk of an old tree on fire with a burning glass : on another, while he was amusing himself with a blue flame, his tutor came into the room and received a severe shock from a highly-charged Leyden jar. During the holidays Shelley carried on the same pursuits at Field Place. "His own hands and clothes," says Miss Shelley, "were constantly stained and corroded with acids, and it only seemed too probable that some day the house would be burned down, or some serious mischief happen to himself or others from the explosion of combustibles." This taste for science Shelley long retained. If we may trust Mr. Hogg's memory, the first conversation which that friend had with him at Oxford, consisted almost wholly of an impassioned monologue from Shelley on the revolution to be wrought by science

in all realms of thought. His imagination was fascinated by the boundless vistas opened to the student of chemistry. When he first discovered that the four elements were not final, it gave him the acutest pleasure: and this is highly characteristic of the genius which was always seeking to transcend and reach the life of life withdrawn from ordinary gaze. On the other hand he seems to have delighted in the toys of science, playing with a solar microscope, and mixing strangest compounds in his crucibles, without taking the trouble to study any of its branches systematically. In his later years he abandoned these pursuits. But a charming reminiscence of them occurs in that most delightful of his familiar poems, the *Letter to Maria Gisborne*.

While translating Pliny and dabbling in chemistry, Shelley was not wholly neglectful of Etonian studies. He acquired a fluent, if not a correct, knowledge of both Greek and Latin, and astonished his contemporaries by the facility with which he produced verses in the latter language. His powers of memory were extraordinary, and the rapidity with which he read a book, taking in seven or eight lines at a glance, and seizing the sense upon the hint of leading words, was no less astonishing. Impatient speed and indifference to minutiae were indeed among the cardinal qualities of his intellect. To them we may trace not only the swiftness of his imaginative flight, but also his frequent satisfaction with the somewhat less than perfect in artistic execution.

That Shelley was not wholly friendless or unhappy at Eton may be gathered from numerous small circumstances. Hogg says that his Oxford rooms were full of handsome leaving books, and that he was frequently visited by old Etonian acquaintances. We are also told that he spent

the 40*l.* gained by his first novel, *Zastrozzi*, on a farewell supper to eight school-boy friends. A few lines, too, might be quoted from his own poem, the *Boat on the Serchio*, to prove that he did not entertain a merely disagreeable memory of his school life.¹ Yet the general experience of Eton must have been painful; and it is sad to read of this gentle and pure spirit being goaded by his coarser comrades into fury, or coaxed to curse his father and the king for their amusement. It may be worth mentioning that he was called "the Atheist" at Eton; and though Hogg explains this by saying that "the Atheist" was an official character among the boys, selected from time to time for his defiance of authority, yet it is not improbable that Shelley's avowed opinions may even then have won for him a title which he proudly claimed in after-life. To allude to his boyish incantations and nocturnal commerce with fiends and phantoms would scarcely be needful, were it not that they seem to have deeply tinged his imagination. While describing the growth of his own genius in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, he makes the following reference to circumstances which might otherwise be trivial:—

While yet a boy, I sought for ghosts, and sped
Thro' many a listening chamber, cave, and ruin,
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.
I call'd on poisonous names with which our youth is fed,
I was not heard, I saw them not—
When, musing deeply on the lot
Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing
All vital things that wake to bring
News of birds and blossoming,—
Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;
I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy!

¹ Forman's edition, vol. iv. p. 115.

Among his friends at Windsor was one whose name will always be revered by Shelley's worshippers; for he alone discerned the rare gifts of the strange and solitary boy, and Shelley loved him. Dr. Lind was an old man, a physician, and a student of chemistry. Shelley spent long hours at his house, conversing with him, and receiving such instruction in philosophy and science as the grey-haired scholar could impart. The affection which united them must have been of no common strength or quality; for when Shelley lay ill of a fever at Field Place, and had conceived the probably ill-founded notion that his father intended to place him in a mad-house, he managed to convey a message to his friend at Eton, on the receipt of which Dr. Lind travelled to Horsham, and by his sympathy and skill restored the sick boy's confidence. It may incidentally be pointed out that this story, credited as true by Lady Shelley in her Memorials, shows how early an estrangement had begun between the poet and his father. We look, moreover, vainly for that mother's influence which might have been so beneficial to the boy in whom "love and life were twins, born at one birth." From Dr. Lind Shelley not only received encouragement to pursue his chemical studies; but he also acquired the habit of corresponding with persons unknown to him, whose opinions he might be anxious to discover or dispute. This habit, as we shall see in the sequel, determined Shelley's fate on two important occasions of his life. In return for the help extended to him at Eton, Shelley conferred undying fame on Dr. Lind; the characters of Zonaras in *Prince Athanase*, and of the hermit in *Laon and Cythna*, are portraits painted by the poet of his boyhood's friend.

The months which elapsed between Eton and Oxford

were an important period in Shelley's life. At this time a boyish liking for his cousin, Harriet Grove, ripened into real attachment; and though there was perhaps no formal engagement between them, the parents on both sides looked with approval on their love. What it concerns us to know about this early passion, is given in a letter from a brother of Miss Grove. "Bysshe was at that time (just after leaving Eton) more attached to my sister Harriet than I can express, and I recollect well the moonlight walks we four had at Strode and also at St. Irving's; that, I think was the name of the place, then the Duke of Norfolk's, at Horsham." For some time after the date mentioned in this letter, Shelley and Miss Grove kept up an active correspondence; but the views he expressed on speculative subjects soon began to alarm her. She consulted her mother and her father, and the engagement was broken off. The final separation does not seem to have taken place until the date of Shelley's expulsion from Oxford; and not the least cruel of the pangs he had to suffer at that period, was the loss of one to whom he had given his whole heart unreservedly. The memory of Miss Grove long continued to haunt his imagination, nor is there much doubt that his first unhappy marriage was contracted while the wound remained unhealed. [The name of Harriet Westbrook and something in her face reminded him of Harriet Grove; it is even still uncertain to which Harriet the dedication of *Queen Mab* is addressed.]¹

In his childhood Shelley scribbled verses with fluency, by no means unusual in the case of forward boys; and we have seen that at Sion House he greedily devoured the sentimental novels of the day. His favourite poets at the

¹ See Medwin, vol. i. p. 68.

time of which I am now writing, were Monk Lewis and Southey; his favourite books in prose were romances by Mrs. Radcliffe and Godwin. He now began to yearn for fame and publicity. Miss Shelley speaks of a play written by her brother and her sister Elizabeth, which was sent to Matthews the comedian, and courteously returned as unfit for acting. She also mentions a little volume of her own verses, which the boy had printed with the tell-tale name of "H—ll—n Sh—ll—y" on the title-page. Medwin gives a long account of a poem on the story of the Wandering Jew, composed by him in concert with Shelley during the winter of 1809—1810. They sent the manuscript to Thomas Campbell, who returned it with the observation that it contained but two good lines:—

It seemed as if an angel's sigh
Had breathed the plaintive symphony.

Undeterred by this adverse criticism Shelley subsequently offered *The Wandering Jew* to the publishers, Messrs. Ballantyne and Co. of Edinburgh. It was reviewed in the *Edinburgh Journal* in 1829; but it remained in MS. till 1831, when a portion was printed in *Fraser's Magazine*.

Just before leaving Eton he finished his novel of *Zastrozzi*, which some critics trace to its source in *Zofloya the Moor*, perused by him at Sion House. The most astonishing fact about this incoherent medley of mad sentiment is that it served to furnish forth the 40*l*. Eton supper already spoken of, that it was duly ushered into the world of letters by Messrs. Wilkie and Robinson on the 5th of June, 1810, and that it was seriously reviewed. The dates of Shelley's publications now come fast and frequent. In the late summer of 1810 he introduced himself to Mr. J. J. Stockdale, the then fashionable publisher

of poems and romances, at his house of business in Pall Mall. With characteristic impetuosity the young author implored assistance in a difficulty. He had commissioned a printer in Horsham to strike off the astounding number of 1480 copies of a volume of poems; and he had no money to pay the printer's bill. Would Stockdale help him out of this dilemma, by taking up the quires and duly ushering the book into the world? Throughout his life Shelley exercised a wonderful fascination over the people with whom he came in contact, and almost always won his way with them as much by personal charm as by determined and impassioned will. Accordingly on this occasion Stockdale proved accommodating. The Horsham printer was somehow satisfied; and on the 17th of September, 1810, the little book came out with the title of *Original Poetry, by Victor and Cazire*. This volume has disappeared; and much fruitless conjecture has been expended upon the question of Shelley's collaborator in his juvenile attempt. Cazire stands for some one; probably it is meant to represent a woman's name, and that woman may have been either Elizabeth Shelley or Harriet Grove. The *Original Poetry* had only been launched a week, when Stockdale discovered on a closer inspection of the book that it contained some verses well known to the world as the production of M. G. Lewis. He immediately communicated with Shelley, and the whole edition was suppressed—not, however, before about one hundred copies had passed into circulation. Shelley satisfied Stockdale that this act of literary larceny was due to his collaborator, who may have been his intimate friend Edward Graham; and the publisher saw no reason to break with him. On the 14th of November in the same year he issued Shelley's second novel from his press, and entered into negotiations

with him for the publication of more poetry. The new romance was named *St. Irvyne, or the Rosicrucian*. This tale, no less unreadable than *Zastrozzi*, and even more chaotic in its plan, contained a good deal of poetry, which has been incorporated in the most recent editions of Shelley's works. A certain interest attaches to it as the first known link between Shelley and William Godwin, for it was composed under the influence of the latter's novel, *St. Leon*. The title, moreover, carries us back to those moonlight walks with Harriet Grove alluded to above. Shelley's earliest attempts in literature have but little value for the student of poetry, except in so far as they illustrate the psychology of genius and its wayward growth. Their intrinsic merit is almost less than nothing, and no one could predict from their perusal the course which the future poet of *The Cenci* and *Epeisychidion* was to take. It might indeed be argued that the defects of his great qualities, the over-ideality, the haste, the incoherence, and the want of grasp on narrative, are glaringly apparent in these early works. But while this is true, the qualities themselves are absent. A cautious critic will only find food in *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne* for wondering how such flowers and fruits of genius could have lain concealed within a germ apparently so barren. There is even less of the real Shelley discernible in these productions, than of the real Byron in the *Hours of Idleness*.

In the Michaelmas Term of 1810 Shelley entered University College, Oxford, as Leicester scholar; and very soon after his arrival he made the acquaintance of a man who was destined to play a prominent part in his subsequent history, and to bequeath to posterity the most brilliant, if not in all respects the most trustworthy, record of his marvellous youth. Thomas Jefferson Hogg was

unlike Shelley in temperament and tastes. His feet were always planted on the earth, while Shelley flew aloft to heaven with singing robes around him, or the mantle of the prophet on his shoulders.¹ Hogg had much of the cynic in his nature; he was a shrewd man of the world, and a caustic humorist. Positive and practical, he chose the beaten path of life, rose to eminence as a lawyer, and cherished the Church and State opinions of a staunch Tory. Yet, though he differed so essentially from the divine poet, he understood the greatness of Shelley at a glance, and preserved for us a record of his friend's early days, which is incomparable for the vividness of its portraiture. The chapters which narrate Shelley's course of life at Oxford have all the charm of a romance. No novel indeed is half so delightful as that picture, at once affectionate and satirical, tender and humorous, extravagant and delicately shaded, of the student life enjoyed together for a few short months by the inseparable friends. To make extracts from a masterpiece of such consummate workmanship is almost painful. Future biographers of Shelley, writing on a scale adequate to the greatness of their subject, will be content to lay their pens down for a season at this point, and let Hogg tell the tale in his own wayward but inimitable fashion. I must confine myself to a few quotations and a barren abstract, referring my readers to the ever-memorable pages 48—286 of Hogg's first volume, for the life that cannot be transferred to these.

"At the commencement of Michaelmas term," says this

¹ He told Trelawny that he had been attracted to Shelley simply by his "rare talents as a scholar;" and Trelawny has recorded his opinion that Hogg's portrait of their friend was faithful, in spite of a total want of sympathy with his poetic genius. This testimony is extremely valuable.

biographer, "that is, at the end of October, in the year 1810, I happened one day to sit next to a freshman at dinner; it was his first appearance in hall. His figure was slight, and his aspect remarkably youthful, even at our table, where all were very young. He seemed thoughtful and absent. He ate little, and had no acquaintance with any one." The two young men began a conversation, which turned upon the respective merits of German and Italian poetry, a subject they neither of them knew anything about. After dinner it was continued in Hogg's rooms, where Shelley soon led the talk to his favourite topic of science. "As I felt, in truth, but a slight interest in the subject of his conversation, I had leisure to examine, and I may add, to admire, the appearance of my very extraordinary guest. It was a sum of many contradictions. His figure was slight and fragile, and yet his bones and joints were large and strong. He was tall, but he stooped so much, that he seemed of a low stature. His clothes were expensive, and made according to the most approved mode of the day; but they were tumbled, rumpled, unbrushed. His gestures were abrupt, and sometimes violent, occasionally even awkward, yet more frequently gentle and graceful. His complexion was delicate, and almost feminine, of the purest red and white; yet he was tanned and freckled by exposure to the sun, having passed the autumn, as he said, in shooting. His features, his whole face, and particularly his head, were, in fact, unusually small; yet the last *appeared* of a remarkable bulk, for his hair was long and bushy, and in fits of absence, and in the agonies (if I may use the word) of anxious thought, he often rubbed it fiercely with his hands, or passed his fingers quickly through his locks unconsciously, so that it was singularly wild and rough. In times when it was the mode to imi-

tate stage-coachmen as closely as possible in costume, and when the hair was invariably cropped, like that of our soldiers, this eccentricity was very striking. His features were not symmetrical (the mouth, perhaps, excepted), yet was the effect of the whole extremely powerful. They breathed an animation, a fire, an enthusiasm, a vivid and preternatural intelligence, that I never met with in any other countenance. Nor was the moral expression less beautiful than the intellectual ; for there was a softness, a delicacy, a gentleness, and especially (though this will surprise many) that air of profound religious veneration, that characterizes the best works, and chiefly the frescoes (and into these they infused their whole souls), of the great masters of Florence and of Rome. I recognized the very peculiar expression in these wonderful productions long afterwards, and with a satisfaction mingled with much sorrow, for it was after the decease of him in whose countenance I had first observed it."

In another place Hogg gives some details which complete the impression of Shelley's personal appearance, and which are fully corroborated by Trelawny's recollections of a later date. "There were many striking contrasts in the character and behaviour of Shelley, and one of the most remarkable was a mixture, or alternation, of awkwardness with agility—of the clumsy with the graceful. He would stumble in stepping across the floor of a drawing-room ; he would trip himself up on a smooth-shaven grass-plot, and he would tumble in the most inconceivable manner in ascending the commodious, facile, and well-carpeted staircase of an elegant mansion, so as to bruise his nose or his lip on the upper steps, or to tread upon his hands, and even occasionally to disturb the composure of a well-bred footman ; on the contrary, he would often glide without

collision through a crowded assembly, thread with unerring dexterity a most intricate path, or securely and rapidly tread the most arduous and uncertain ways."

This word-portrait corresponds in its main details to the descriptions furnished by other biographers, who had the privilege of Shelley's friendship. His eyes were blue, unfathomably dark and lustrous. His hair was brown; but very early in life it became grey, while his unwrinkled face retained to the last a look of wonderful youth. It is admitted on all sides that no adequate picture was ever painted of him. Mulready is reported to have said that he was too beautiful to paint. And yet, although so singularly lovely, he owed less of his charm to regularity of feature or to grace of movement, than to an indescribable personal fascination. One further detail Hogg pointedly insists upon. Shelley's voice "was excruciating; it was intolerably shrill, harsh, and discordant." This is strongly stated; but, though the terms are certainly exaggerated, I believe that we must trust this first impression made on Shelley's friend. There is a considerable mass of convergent testimony to the fact that Shelley's voice was high pitched, and that when he became excited, he raised it to a scream. The epithets "shrill," "piercing," "penetrating," frequently recur in the descriptions given of it. At the same time its quality seems to have been less dissonant than thrilling; there is abundance of evidence to prove that he could modulate it exquisitely in the reading of poetry, and its tone proved no obstacle to the persuasive charms of his eloquence in conversation. Like all finely tempered natures, he vibrated in harmony with the subjects of his thought. Excitement made his utterance shrill and sharp. Deep feeling or the sense of beauty lowered its tone to richness; but the *timbre* was always acute, in sympathy

with his intense temperament. All was of one piece in Shelley's nature. This peculiar voice, varying from moment to moment and affecting different sensibilities in divers ways, corresponds to the high-strung passion of his life, his fine-drawn and ethereal fancies, and the clear vibrations of his palpitating verse. Such a voice, far-reaching, penetrating, and unearthly, befitted one who lived in rarest ether on the topmost heights of human thought.

The acquaintance begun that October evening soon ripened into close friendship. Shelley and Hogg from this time forward spent a large part of their days and nights together in common studies, walks, and conversations. It was their habit to pass the morning, each in his own rooms, absorbed in private reading. At one o'clock they met and lunched, and then started for long rambles in the country. Shelley frequently carried pistols with him upon these occasions, and would stop to fix his father's franks upon convenient trees and shoot at them. The practice of pistol-shooting, adopted so early in his life, was afterwards one of his favourite amusements in the company of Byron. Hogg says that in his use of fire-arms he was extraordinarily careless. "How often have I lamented that Nature, which so rarely bestows upon the world a creature endowed with such marvellous talents, ungraciously rendered the gift less precious by implanting a fatal taste for perilous recreations, and a thoughtlessness in the pursuit of them, that often caused his existence from one day to another to seem in itself miraculous." On their return from these excursions the two friends, neither of whom cared for dining in the College Hall, drank tea and supped together, Shelley's rooms being generally chosen as the scene of their symposia.



These rooms are described as a perfect palace of confusion—chaos on chaos heaped of chemical apparatus, books, electrical machines, unfinished manuscripts, and furniture worn into holes by acids. It was perilous to use the poet's drinking-vessels, lest perchance a seven-shilling piece half dissolved in *aqua regia* should lurk at the bottom of the bowl. Handsome razors were used to cut the lids of wooden boxes, and valuable books served to support lamps or crucibles; for in his vehement precipitation Shelley always laid violent hands on what he found convenient to the purpose of the moment. Here the friends talked and read until late in the night. Their chief studies at this time were in Locke and Hume and the French essayists. Shelley's bias toward metaphysical speculation was beginning to assert itself. He read the School Logic with avidity, and practised himself without intermission in dialectical discussion. Hogg observes, what is confirmed by other testimony, that in reasoning Shelley never lost sight of the essential bearings of the topic in dispute, never condescended to personal or captious arguments, and was Socratically bent on following the dialogue wherever it might lead, without regard for consequences. Plato was another of their favourite authors; but Hogg expressly tells us that they only approached the divine philosopher through the medium of translations. It was not until a later period that Shelley studied his dialogues in the original: but the substance of them, seen through Mdme. Dacier's version, acted powerfully on the poet's sympathetic intellect. In fact, although at this time he had adopted the conclusions of materialism, he was at heart all through his life an idealist. Therefore the mixture of the poet and the sage in Plato fascinated him. The doctrine of *anam-*

nesis, which offers so strange a vista to speculative reverie, by its suggestion of an earlier existence in which our knowledge was acquired, took a strong hold upon his imagination; he would stop in the streets to gaze wistfully at babies, wondering whether their newly imprisoned souls were not replete with the wisdom stored up in a previous life.

In the acquisition of knowledge he was then as ever unrelaxing. "No student ever read more assiduously. He was to be found, book in hand, at all hours; reading in season and out of season; at table, in bed, and especially during a walk; not only in the quiet country, and in retired paths; not only at Oxford, in the public walks, and High Street, but in the most crowded thoroughfares of London. Nor was he less absorbed by the volume that was open before him, in Cheapside, in Cranbourne Alley, or in Bond Street, than in a lonely lane, or a secluded library. Sometimes a vulgar fellow would attempt to insult or annoy the eccentric student in passing. Shelley always avoided the malignant interruption by stepping aside with his vast and quiet agility." And again:—"I never beheld eyes that devoured the pages more voraciously than his; I am convinced that two-thirds of the period of day and night were often employed in reading. It is no exaggeration to affirm, that out of the twenty-four hours, he frequently read sixteen. At Oxford, his diligence in this respect was exemplary, but it greatly increased afterwards, and I sometimes thought that he carried it to a pernicious excess: I am sure, at least, that I was unable to keep pace with him." With Shelley study was a passion, and the acquisition of knowledge was the entrance into a thrice-hallowed sanctuary. "The irreverent many cannot comprehend the awe—the careless apathetic worldling cannot imagine the enthusiasm—nor can the tongue that attempts only to

speak of things visible to the bodily eye, express the mighty emotion that inwardly agitated him, when he approached, for the first time, a volume which he believed to be replete with the recondite and mystic philosophy of antiquity: his cheeks glowed, his eyes became bright, his whole frame trembled, and his entire attention was immediately swallowed up in the depths of contemplation. The rapid and vigorous conversion of his soul to intellect can only be compared with the instantaneous ignition and combustion, which dazzle the sight, when a bundle of dry reeds, or other light inflammable substance, is thrown upon a fire already rich with accumulated heat."

As at Eton, so at Oxford, Shelley refused to keep the beaten track of prescribed studies, or to run in ordinary grooves of thought. The mere fact that Aristotle was a duty, seems to have disgusted him with the author of the *Organon*, from whom, had his works been prohibited to undergraduates, he would probably have been eager to learn much. For mathematics and jurisprudence he evinced a marked distaste. The common business of the English Parliament had no attraction for him, and he read few newspapers. While his mind was keenly interested in great political questions, he could not endure the trivial treatment of them in the daily press, and cared far more for principles than for the incidents of party warfare. Here again he showed that impatience of detail, and that audacity of self-reliant genius, which were the source of both his weakness and his strength. He used to speak with aversion of a Parliamentary career, and told Hogg that though this had been suggested to him, as befitting his position, by the Duke of Norfolk, he could never bring himself to mix with the rabble of the House. It is none the less true, however, that he enter-

tained some vague notion of eventually succeeding to his father's seat.

Combined with his eager intellectual activity, there was something intermittent and fitful in the working of his mental faculties. Hogg, in particular, mentions one of his habits in a famous passage, which, since it brings the two friends vividly before us, may here be quoted. "I was enabled to continue my studies afterwards in the evening, in consequence of a very remarkable peculiarity. My young and energetic friend was then overcome by extreme drowsiness, which speedily and completely vanquished him; he would sleep from two to four hours, often so soundly that his slumbers resembled a deep lethargy; he lay occasionally upon the sofa, but more commonly stretched upon the rug before a large fire, like a cat; and his little round head was exposed to such a fierce heat, that I used to wonder how he was able to bear it. Sometimes I have interposed some shelter, but rarely with any permanent effect; for the sleeper usually contrived to turn himself, and to roll again into the spot where the fire glowed the brightest. His torpor was generally profound, but he would sometimes discourse incoherently for a long while in his sleep. At six he would suddenly compose himself, even in the midst of a most animated narrative, or of earnest discussion; and he would lie buried in entire forgetfulness, in a sweet and mighty oblivion, until ten, when he would suddenly start up, and, rubbing his eyes with great violence, and passing his fingers swiftly through his long hair, would enter at once into a vehement argument, or begin to recite verses, either of his own composition or from the works of others, with a rapidity and an energy that were often quite painful."



Shelley's moral qualities are described with no less enthusiasm than his intellectual and physical beauty by the friend from whom I have already drawn so largely. Love was the root and basis of his nature : this love, first developed as domestic affection, next as friendship, then as a youth's passion, now began to shine with steady lustre as an all-embracing devotion to his fellow-men. There is something inevitably chilling in the words "benevolence" and "philanthropy." A disillusioned world is inclined to look with languid approbation on the former, and to disbelieve in the latter. Therefore I will not use them to describe that intense and glowing passion of unselfishness, which throughout his life led Shelley to find his strongest interests in the joys and sorrows of his fellow-creatures, which inflamed his imagination with visions of humanity made perfect, and which filled his days with sweet deeds of unnumbered charities. I will rather collect from the pages of his friend's biography a few passages recording the first impression of his character, the memory of which may be carried by the reader through the following brief record of his singular career :—

"His speculations were as wild as the experience of twenty-one years has shown them to be ; but the zealous earnestness for the augmentation of knowledge, and the glowing philanthropy and boundless benevolence that marked them, and beamed forth in the whole deportment of that extraordinary boy, are not less astonishing than they would have been if the whole of his glorious anticipations had been prophetic ; for these high qualities, at least, I have never found a parallel."

"In no individual perhaps was the moral sense ever more completely developed than in Shelley ; in no being was the perception of right and of wrong more acute."

"As his love of intellectual pursuits was vehement, and the vigour of his genius almost celestial, so were the purity and sanctity of his life most conspicuous."

"I never knew any one so prone to admire as he was, in whom the principle of veneration was so strong."

"I have had the happiness to associate with some of the best specimens of gentlemen; but with all due deference for those admirable persons (may my candour and my preference be pardoned), I can affirm that Shelley was almost the only example I have yet found that was never wanting, even in the most minute particular, of the infinite and various observances of pure, entire, and perfect gentility."

"Shelley was actually offended, and indeed more indignant than would appear to be consistent with the singular mildness of his nature, at a coarse and awkward jest, especially if it were immodest, or uncleanly; in the latter case his anger was unbounded, and his uneasiness pre-eminent; he was, however, sometimes vehemently delighted by exquisite and delicate sallies, particularly with a fanciful, and perhaps somewhat fantastical facetiousness—possibly the more because he was himself utterly incapable of pleasantry."

"I never could discern in him any more than two fixed principles. The first was a strong irrepressible love of liberty; of liberty in the abstract, and somewhat after the pattern of the ancient republics, without reference to the English constitution, respecting which he knew little and cared nothing, heeding it not at all. The second was an equally ardent love of toleration of all opinions, but more especially of religious opinions; of toleration, complete, entire, universal, unlimited; and, as a deduction and corollary from which latter principle, he felt an intense

abhorrence of persecution of every kind, public or private."

The testimony in the foregoing extracts as to Shelley's purity and elevation of moral character is all the stronger, because it is given by a man not over-inclined to praise, and of a temperament as unlike the poet's as possible. If we were to look only upon this side of his portrait, we should indeed be almost forced to use the language of his most enthusiastic worshippers, and call him an archangel. But it must be admitted that, though so pure and gentle and exalted, Shelley's virtues were marred by eccentricity, by something at times approaching madness, which paralysed his efficiency by placing him in a glaringly false relation to some of the best men of the world around him. He possessed certain good qualities in excess; for, though it sounds paradoxical, it is none the less true that a man may be too tolerant, too fond of liberty: and it was precisely the extravagance of these virtues in Shelley which drove him into acts and utterances so antagonistic to society as to be intolerable.

Of Shelley's poetical studies we hear but little at this epoch. His genius by a stretch of fancy might be compared to one of those double stars which dart blue and red rays of light: for it was governed by two luminaries, poetry and metaphysics; and at this time the latter seems to have been in the ascendant. It is, however, interesting to learn that he read and re-read Landon's *Gebir*—stronger meat than either Southey's epics or the ghost-lyrics of Monk Lewis. Hogg found him one day busily engaged in correcting proofs of some original poems. Shelley asked his friend what he thought of them, and Hogg answered that it might be possible by a little alteration to turn them into capital burlesques. This

idea took the young poet's fancy ; and the friends between them soon effected a metamorphosis in Shelley's serious verses, by which they became unmistakably ridiculous. Having achieved their purpose, they now bethought them of the proper means of publication. Upon whom should the poems, a medley of tyrannicide and revolutionary raving, be fathered ? Peg Nicholson, a mad washerwoman, had recently attempted George the Third's life with a carving-knife. No more fitting author could be found. They would give their pamphlet to the world as her work, edited by an admiring nephew. The printer appreciated the joke no less than the authors of it. He provided splendid paper and magnificent type ; and before long the book of nonsense was in the hands of Oxford readers. It sold for the high price of half-a-crown a copy ; and, what is hardly credible, the gownsmen received it as a genuine production. " It was indeed a kind of fashion to be seen reading it in public, as a mark of nice discernment, of a delicate and fastidious taste in poetry, and the best criterion of a choice spirit." Such was the genesis of *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*, edited by John Fitz Victor. The name of the supposititious nephew reminds us of *Original Poems* by Victor and Cazire, and raises the question whether the poems in that lost volume may not have partly furnished forth this Oxford travesty.

Shelley's next publication, or quasi-publication, was neither so innocent in substance nor so pleasant in its consequences. After leaving Eton, he continued the habit, learned from Dr. Lind, of corresponding with distinguished persons whom he did not personally know. Thus we find him about this time addressing Miss Felicia Browne (afterwards Mrs. Hemans) and Leigh Hunt. He

plied his correspondents with all kinds of questions ; and as the dialectical interest was uppermost at Oxford, he now endeavoured to engage them in discussions on philosophical and religious topics. We have seen that his favourite authors were Locke, Hume, and the French materialists. With the impulsiveness peculiar to his nature, he adopted the negative conclusions of a shallow nominalistic philosophy. It was a fundamental point with him to regard all questions, however sifted and settled by the wise of former ages, as still open ; and in his inordinate thirst for liberty, he rejoiced to be the Deicide of a pernicious theological delusion. In other words, he passed at Oxford by one leap from a state of indifferentism with regard to Christianity, into an attitude of vehement antagonism. With a view to securing answers to his missives, he printed a short abstract of Hume's and other arguments against the existence of a Deity, presented in a series of propositions, and signed with a mathematically important "Q. E. D." This document he forwarded to his proposed antagonists, expressing his inability to answer its arguments, and politely requesting them to help him. When it so happened that any incautious correspondents acceded to this appeal, Shelley fell with merciless severity upon their feeble and commonplace reasoning. The little pamphlet of two pages was entitled *The Necessity of Atheism* ; and its proposed publication, beyond the limits of private circulation already described, is proved by an advertisement (Feb. 9, 1811) in the *Oxford University and City Herald*. It was suppressed after being for a few hours offered for sale.

A copy of this syllabus reached a Fellow of another college, who made the Master of University acquainted with the fact. On the morning of March 25, 1811,

Shelley was sent for to the Senior Common Room, and asked whether he acknowledged himself to be the author of the obnoxious pamphlet. On his refusal to answer this question, he was served with a formal sentence of expulsion duly drawn up and sealed. The college authorities have been blamed for unfair dealing in this matter. It is urged that they ought to have proceeded by the legal method of calling witnesses; and that the sentence was not only out of all proportion to the offence, but that it ought not to have been executed till persuasion had been tried. With regard to the former indictment, I do not think that a young man still *in statu pupillari*, who refused to purge himself of what he must have known to be a serious charge, had any reason to expect from his tutors the formalities of an English court of law. There is no doubt that the Fellows were satisfied of his being the real author; else they could not have ventured on so summary a measure as expulsion. Their question was probably intended to give the culprit an occasion for apology, of which they foresaw he would not avail himself. With regard to the second, it is true that Shelley was amenable to kindness, and that gentle and wise treatment from men whom he respected, might possibly have brought him to retract his syllabus. But it must be remembered that he despised the Oxford dons with all his heart; and they were probably aware of this. He was a dexterous, impassioned reasoner, whom they little cared to encounter in argument on such a topic. During his short period of residence, moreover, he had not shown himself so tractable as to secure the good wishes of superiors, who prefer conformity to incommensurable genius. It is likely that they were not averse to getting rid of him as a man dangerous to the peace of their society; and now they

had a good occasion. Nor was it to be expected that the champion and apostle of Atheism—and Shelley was certainly both, in spite of Hogg's attempts to tone down the purpose of his document—should be unmolested in his propaganda by the aspirants to fat livings and ecclesiastical dignities. Real blame, however, attaches to these men : first, for their dulness to discern Shelley's amiable qualities ; and, secondly, for the prejudgment of the case implied in the immediate delivery of their sentence. Both Hogg and Shelley accused them, besides, of a gross brutality, which was, to say the least, unseemly on so serious an occasion. At the beginning of this century the learning and the manners of the Oxford dons were at a low ebb ; and the Fellows of University College acted harshly but not altogether unjustly, ignorantly but after their own kind, in this matter of Shelley's expulsion. *Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda e passa.* Hogg, who stood by his friend manfully at this crisis, and dared the authorities to deal with him as they had dealt with Shelley, adding that they had just as much real proof to act upon in his case, and intimating his intention of returning the same answer as to the authorship of the pamphlet, was likewise expelled. The two friends left Oxford together by the coach on the morning of the 26th of March.

Shelley felt his expulsion acutely. At Oxford he had enjoyed the opportunities of private reading which the University afforded in those days of sleepy studies and innocuous examinations. He delighted in the security of his "oak," and above all things he found pleasure in the society of his one chosen friend. He was now obliged to exchange these good things for the tumult and discomfort of London. His father, after clumsily attempting compromises, had forbidden his return to Field Place. The

whole fabric of his former life was broken up. The last hope of renewing his engagement with his cousin had to be abandoned. His pecuniary position was precarious, and in a short time he was destined to lose the one friend who had so generously shared his fate. Yet the notion of recovering his position as a student in one of our great Universities, of softening his father's indignation, or of ameliorating his present circumstances by the least concession, never seems to have occurred to him. He had suffered in the cause of truth and liberty, and he willingly accepted his martyrdom for conscience' sake.

CHAPTER III

LIFE IN LONDON AND FIRST MARRIAGE.

It is of some importance at this point to trace the growth and analyse the substance of Shelley's atheistical opinions. The cardinal characteristic of his nature was an implacable antagonism to shams and conventions, which passed too easily into impatient rejection of established forms as worse than useless. Born in the stronghold of squirearchical prejudices, nursed amid the trivial platitudes that then passed in England for philosophy, his keen spirit flew to the opposite pole of thought with a recoil that carried him at first to inconsiderate negation. His passionate love of liberty, his loathing for intolerance, his impatience of control for self and others, and his vivid logical sincerity, combined to make him the Quixotic champion of extreme opinions. He was too fearless to be wise, too precipitate to suspend his judgment, too convinced of the paramount importance of iconoclasm, to mature his views in silence. With the unbounded audacity of youth, he hoped to take the fortresses of "Anarch Custom" by storm at the first assault. His favourite ideal was the vision of a youth, Laon or Lionel, whose eloquence had power to break the bonds of despotism, as the sun thaws ice upon an April morning. It was enough, he thought, to hurl the glove of defiance boldly at

the tyrant's face—to sow the *Necessity of Atheism* broadcast on the bench of Bishops, and to depict incest in his poetry, not because he wished to defend it, but because society must learn to face the most abhorrent problems with impartiality. Gifted with a touch as unerring as Ithuriel's spear for the unmasking of hypocrisy, he strove to lay bare the very substance of the soul beneath the crust of dogma and the froth of traditional beliefs; nor does it seem to have occurred to him that, while he stripped the rags and patches that conceal the nakedness of ordinary human nature, he might drag away the web and woof of nobler thought. In his poet-philosopher's imagination there bloomed a wealth of truth and love and beauty so abounding, that behind the mirage he destroyed, he saw no blank, but a new Eternal City of the Spirit. He never doubted whether his fellow-creatures were certain to be equally fortunate.

Shelley had no faculty for compromise, no perception of the blended truths and falsehoods through which the mind of man must gradually win its way from the obscurity of myths into the clearness of positive knowledge, for ever toiling and for ever foiled, and forced to content itself with the increasing consciousness of limitations. Brimming over with love for men, he was deficient in sympathy with the conditions under which they actually think and feel. Could he but dethrone the Anarch Custom, the millennium, he argued, would immediately arrive; nor did he stop to think how different was the fibre of his own soul from that of the unnumbered multitudes around him. In his adoration of what he recognized as living, he retained no reverence for the ossified experience of past ages. The principle of evolution, which forms a saving link between the obsolete and the

organically vital, had no place in his logic. The spirit of the French Revolution, uncompromising, shattering, eager to build in a day the structure which long centuries of growth must fashion, was still fresh upon him. We who have survived the enthusiasms of that epoch, who are exhausted with its passions, and who have suffered from its reactive impulses, can scarcely comprehend the vivid faith and young-eyed joy of aspiration which sustained Shelley in his flight toward the region of impossible ideals. For he had a vital faith; and this faith made the ideals he conceived, seem possible—faith in the duty and desirability of overthrowing idols; faith in the gospel of liberty, fraternity, equality; faith in the divine beauty of nature; faith in a love that rules the universe; faith in the perfectibility of man; faith in the omnipresent soul, whereof our souls are atoms; faith in affection as the ruling and co-ordinating substance of morality. The man who lived by this faith was in no vulgar sense of the word an Atheist. When he proclaimed himself to be one, he pronounced his hatred of a gloomy religion, which had been the instrument of kings and priests for the enslavement of their fellow-creatures. As he told his friend Trelawny, he used the word Atheism “to express his abhorrence of superstition; he took it up as a knight took up a gauntlet, in defiance of injustice.” But Shelley believed too much to be consistently agnostic. He believed so firmly and intensely in his own religion—a kind of passionate positivism, a creed which seemed to have no God because it was all God—that he felt convinced he only needed to destroy accepted figments, for the light which blazed around him to break through and flood the world with beauty. Shelley can only be called an Atheist, in so far as he maintained the inadequacy of

hitherto received conceptions of the Deity, and indignantly rejected that Moloch of cruelty who is worshipped in the debased forms of Christianity. He was an Agnostic only in so far as he proclaimed the impossibility of solving the insoluble, and knowing the unknowable. His clear and fearless utterances upon these points place him in the rank of intellectual heroes. But his own soul, compact of human faith and love, was far too religious and too sanguine to merit either epithet as vulgarly applied.

The negative side of Shelley's creed had the moral value which attaches to all earnest conviction, plain speech, defiance of convention, and enthusiasm for intellectual liberty at any cost. It was marred, however, by extravagance, crudity, and presumption. Much that he would fain have destroyed because he found it customary, was solid, true, and beneficial. Much that he thought it desirable to substitute, was visionary, hollow, and pernicious. He lacked the touchstone of mature philosophy, whereby to separate the pinchbeck from the gold of social usage; and in his intense enthusiasm he lost his hold on common sense, which might have saved him from the puerility of arrogant iconoclasm. The positive side of his creed remains precious, not because it was logical, or scientific, or coherent, but because it was an ideal, fervently felt, and penetrated with the whole life-force of an incomparable nature. Such ideals are needed for sustaining man upon his path amid the glooms and shadows of impenetrable ignorance. They form the seal and pledge of his spiritual dignity, reminding him that he was not born to live like brutes, or like the brutes to perish without effort.

*Fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
Ma per seguir virtude e conoscenza*

These criticisms apply to the speculations of Shelley's earlier life, when his crusade against accepted usage was extravagant, and his confidence in the efficacy of mere eloquence to change the world was overweening. The experience of years, however, taught him wisdom without damping his enthusiasm, refined the crudity of his first fervent speculations, and mellowed his philosophy. Had he lived to a ripe age, there is no saying with what clear and beneficent lustre might have shone that light of aspiration which during his turbid youth burned somewhat luridly, and veiled its radiance in the smoke of mere rebelliousness and contradiction.

Hogg and Shelley settled in lodgings at No. 15, Poland Street, soon after their arrival in London. The name attracted Shelley: "it reminded him of Thaddeus of Warsaw and of freedom." He was further fascinated by a gaudy wall-paper of vine-trellises and grapes, which adorned the parlour; and vowed that he would stay there for ever. "For ever," was a word often upon Shelley's lips in the course of his checquered life; and yet few men have been subject to so many sudden changes through the buffetings of fortune from without and the inconstancy of their own purpose, than he was. His biographer has no little trouble to trace and note with accuracy his perpetual flittings and the names of his innumerable temporary residences. A month had not elapsed before Hogg left him in order to begin his own law studies at York; and Shelley abode "alone in the vine-trellised chamber, where he was to remain, a bright-eyed, restless fox amidst sour grapes, not, as his poetic imagination at first suggested, for ever, but a little while longer."

The records of this first residence in London are

meagre, but not unimportant. We hear of negotiations and interviews with Mr. Timothy Shelley, all of which proved unavailing. Shelley would not recede from the position he had taken up. Nothing would induce him to break off his intimacy with Hogg, or to place himself under the tutor selected for him by his father. For Paley's, or as Mr. Shelley called him "Palley's," Evidences he expressed unbounded contempt. The breach between them gradually widened. Mr. Shelley at last determined to try the effect of cutting off supplies; but his son only hardened his heart, and sustained himself by a proud consciousness of martyrdom. I agree with one of Shelley's best biographers, Mr. W. M. Rossetti, in his condemnation of the poet's behaviour as a son. Shelley did not treat his father with the common consideration due from youth to age; and the only instances of unpardonable bad taste to be found in his correspondence or the notes of his conversation, are insulting phrases applied to a man who was really more unfortunate than criminal in his relations to this changeling from the realms of faëry. It is not too much to say that his dislike of his father amounted to derangement; and certainly some of his suspicions with regard to him were the hallucinations of a heated fancy. How so just and gentle a nature was brought into so false a moral situation, whether by some sudden break-down of confidence in childhood or by a gradually increasing mistrust, is an interesting but perhaps insoluble problem. We only know that in his early boyhood Shelley loved his father so much as to have shown unusual emotion during his illness on one occasion, but that, while at Eton, he had already become possessed by a dark suspicion concerning him. This is proved by the episode of Dr. Lind's visit

during his fever. Then and ever afterwards he expected monstrous treatment at his hands, although the elder gentleman was nothing worse than a muddle-headed squire. It has more than once occurred to me that this fever may have been a turning point in his history, and that a delusion, engendered by delirium, may have fixed itself upon his mind, owing to some imperfection in the process of recovery. But the theory is too speculative and unsupported by proof to be more than passingly alluded to.

At this time Shelley found it difficult to pay his lodgings and buy food. It is said that his sisters saved their pocket-money to support him: and we know that he paid them frequent visits at their school on Clapham Common. It was here that his characteristic hatred of tyranny displayed itself on two occasions. "One day," writes Miss Hellen Shelley, "his ire was greatly excited at a black mark hung round one of our throats, as a penalty for some small misdemeanour. He expressed great disapprobation, more of the system than that one of his sisters should be so punished. Another time he found me, I think, in an iron collar, which certainly was a dreadful instrument of torture in my opinion. It was not worn as a punishment, but because I *poked*; but Bysshe declared it would make me grow crooked, and ought to be discontinued immediately." The acquaintance which he now made with one of his sister's school friends was destined to lead to most important results.¹ Harriet Westbrook was a girl of sixteen years, remarkably good-looking, with a brilliant pink and white complexion, beautiful brown hair, a pleasant voice, and a cheerful

¹ It is probable that he saw her for the first time in January, 1811.

temper. She was the daughter of a man who kept a coffee-house in Mount Street, nick-named "Jew" Westbrook, because of his appearance. She had an elder sister, called Eliza, dark of complexion, and gaunt of figure, with the abundant hair that plays so prominent a part in Hogg's relentless portrait. Eliza, being nearly twice as old as Harriet, stood in the relation of a mother to her. Both of these young ladies, and the "Jew" their father, welcomed Shelley with distinguished kindness. Though he was penniless for the nonce, exiled from his home, and under the ban of his family's displeasure, he was still the heir to a large landed fortune and a baronetcy. It was not to be expected that the coffee-house people should look upon him with disfavour.

Shelley paid Harriet frequent visits both at Mrs. Fenning's school and at Mount Street, and soon began a correspondence with her, hoping, as he expressly stated in a letter of a later date, by converting her to his theories, to add his sister and her "to the list of the good, the disinterested, the free." At first she seems to have been horrified at the opinions he expressed; but in this case at least he did not overrate the powers of eloquence. With all the earnestness of an evangelist, he preached his gospel of freethought or atheism, and had the satisfaction of forming his young pupil to his views. He does not seem to have felt any serious inclination for Harriet; but in the absence of other friends, he gladly availed himself of her society. Gradually she became more interesting to him, when he heard mysterious accounts of suffering at home and tyranny at school. This was enough to rouse in Shelley the spirit of Quixotic championship, if not to sow the seeds of love. What

Harriet's ill-treatment really was, no one has been able to discover; yet she used to affirm that her life at this time was so irksome that she contemplated suicide.

During the summer of 1811, Shelley's movements were more than usually erratic, and his mind was in a state of extraordinary restlessness. In the month of May, a kind of accommodation was come to with his father. He received permission to revisit Field Place, and had an allowance made him of 200*l.* a year. His uncle, Captain Pilfold of Cuckfield, was instrumental in effecting this partial reconciliation. Shelley spent some time at his uncle's country house, oscillating between London, Cuckfield, and Field Place, with characteristic rapidity, and paying one brief visit to his cousin Grove at Cwm Elan, near Rhayader, in North Wales. This visit is worth mention, since he now for the first time saw the scenery of waterfalls and mountains. He was, however, too much preoccupied to take much interest in nature. He was divided between his old affection for Miss Grove, his new but somewhat languid interest in Harriet, and a dearly cherished scheme for bringing about a marriage between his sister Elizabeth and his friend Hogg. The letters written to Hogg at this period (vol. i. pp. 387—418), are exceedingly important and interesting, revealing as they do the perturbation of his feelings and the almost morbid excitement of his mind. Now also appears upon the scene Miss Hitchener, of whom more will hereafter be recorded. His enthusiasm for this lady was sudden and extravagant. Shelley's correspondence with her offers abundant material for the study of his opinions in early manhood.

Meanwhile his destiny was shaping itself with a rapidity that plunged him suddenly into decisive and

irrevocable action. It is of the greatest moment to ascertain precisely what his feelings were during this summer with regard to Harriet. Hogg has printed two letters in immediate juxtaposition : the first without date, the second with the post-mark of Rhayader. Shelley ends the first epistle thus : " Your jokes on Harriet Westbrook amuse me : it is a common error for people to fancy others in their own situation, but if I know anything about love, I am *not* in love. I have heard from the Westbrooks, both of whom I highly esteem." He begins the second with these words : " You will perhaps see me before you can answer this ; perhaps not ; heaven knows ! I shall certainly come to York, but *Harriet Westbrook* will decide whether now or in three weeks. Her father has persecuted her in a most horrible way, by endeavouring to compel her to go to school. She asked my advice: resistance was the answer, at the same time that I essayed to mollify Mr. W. in vain ! And in consequence of my advice *she* has thrown herself upon *my* protection. I set off for London on Monday. How flattering a distinction !—I am thinking of ten million things at once. What have I said ? I declare, quite *ludicrous*. I advised her to resist. She wrote to say that resistance was useless, but that she would fly with me, and threw herself upon my protection. We shall have 200*l.* a year ; when we find it run short, we must live, I suppose, upon love ! Gratitude and admiration, all demand that I should love her *for ever*. We shall see you at York. I will hear your arguments for matrimonialism, by which I am now almost convinced. I can get lodgings at York, I suppose. Direct to me at Graham's, 18, Sackville Street, Piccadilly." From a letter recently published by Mr. W. M. Rossetti (the University Magazine, Feb.

1878), we further learn that Harriet, having fallen violently in love with her preceptor, had avowed her passion and flung herself into his arms.

It is clear from these documents, first, that Shelley was not deeply in love with Harriet when he eloped with her; secondly, that he was not prepared for the step; thirdly, that she and her relatives induced him to take it; and fourthly, that he took it under a strong impression of her having been ill-treated. She had appealed to his most powerful passion, the hatred of tyranny. She had excited his admiration by setting conventions at defiance, and showing her readiness to be his mistress. Her confidence called forth his gratitude. Her choice of him for a protector flattered him: and, moreover, she had acted on his advice to carry resistance *à outrance*. There were many good Shelleyan reasons why he should elope with Harriet; but among them all I do not find that spontaneous and unsophisticated feeling which is the substance of enduring love.

In the same series of letters, so incoherently jumbled together by Hogg's carelessness or caprice, Shelley more than once expresses the utmost horror of matrimony. Yet we now find him upon the verge of contracting marriage with a woman whom he did not passionately love, and who had offered herself unreservedly to him. It is worth pausing to observe that even Shelley, fearless and uncompromising as he was in conduct, could not at this crisis practise the principles he so eloquently impressed on others. Yet the point of weakness was honourable. It lay in his respect for women in general, and his tender chivalry for the one woman who had cast herself upon his generosity.¹

¹ See Shelley's third letter to Godwin (Hogg, ii. p. 63) for another defence of his conduct. "We agreed," &c.

"My unfortunate friend Harriet," he writes under date Aug. 15, 1811, from London, whither he had hurried to arrange the affairs of his elopement, "is yet undecided ; not with respect to me, but to herself. How much, my dear friend, have I to tell you ! In my leisure moments for thought, which since I wrote, have been few, I have considered the important point on which you reprobated my hasty decision. The ties of love and honour are doubtless of sufficient strength to bind congenial souls—they are doubtless indissoluble, but by the brutish force of power ; they are delicate and satisfactory. Yet the arguments of impracticability, and what is even worse, the disproportionate sacrifice which the female is called upon to make—these arguments, which you have urged in a manner immediately irresistible, I cannot withstand. Not that I suppose it to be likely that I shall directly be called upon to evince my attachment to either theory. I am become a perfect convert to matrimony, not from temporizing, but from *your* arguments ; nor, much as I wish to emulate your virtues and liken myself to you, do I regret the prejudices of anti-matrimonialism from your example or assertion. No. The *one* argument, which you have urged so often with so much energy ; the sacrifice made by the woman, so disproportioned to any which the man can give—this alone may exculpate me, were it a fault, from uninquiring submission to your superior intellect."

Whether Shelley from his own peculiar point of view was morally justified in twice marrying, is a question of casuistry which has often haunted me. The reasons he alleged in extenuation of his conduct with regard to Harriet, prove the goodness of his heart, his openness to argument, and the delicacy of his unselfishness. But they do not square with his expressed code of conduct ;

nor is it easy to understand how, having found it needful to submit to custom, for his partner's sake, he should have gone on denouncing an institution which he recognized in his own practice. The conclusion seems to be that, though he despised accepted usage, his practical sense was stronger than his theories. In like manner he allowed his children to be baptized.

A letter from Shelley's cousin, Mr. C. H. Grove, gives the details of Harriet's elopement. "When Bysshe finally came to town to elope with Miss Westbrook, he came as usual to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and I was his companion on his visits to her, and finally accompanied them early one morning—I forget now the month, or the date, but it might have been September—in a hackney coach to the Green Dragon, in Gracechurch Street, where we remained all day, till the hour when the mail-coaches start, when they departed in the northern mail for York." From York the young couple made their way at once to Edinburgh, where they were married upon the 28th of August, according to the formalities of the Scotch law.

Shelley had now committed that greatest of social crimes in his father's eyes—a *mésalliance*. Supplies and communications were at once cut off from the prodigal; and it appears that Harriet and he were mainly dependent upon the generosity of Captain Pilfold for subsistence. Even Jew Westbrook, much as he may have rejoiced at seeing his daughter wedded to the heir of several thousands a year, buttoned up his pockets, either because he thought it well to play the part of an injured parent, or because he was not certain about Shelley's expectations. He afterwards made the Shelleys an allowance of 200*l.* a year, and early in 1812 Shelley says that he is in receipt of twice that

income. Whence we may conclude that both fathers before long relented to the extent of the sum above mentioned.

In spite of temporary impecuniosity, the young people lived happily enough in excellent lodgings in George Street. Hogg, who joined them early in September, has drawn a lively picture of their domesticity. Much of the day was spent in reading aloud; for Harriet, who had a fine voice and excellent lungs, was never happy unless she was allowed to read and comment on her favourite authors. Shelley sometimes fell asleep during the performance of these rites; but when he woke refreshed with slumber, he was no less ready than at Oxford to support philosophical paradoxes with impassioned and persuasive eloquence. He began to teach Harriet Latin, set her to work upon the translation of a French story by Madame Cottin, and for his own part executed a version of one of Buffon's treatises. The sitting-room was full of books. It was one of Shelley's peculiarities to buy books wherever he went, regardless of their volume or their cost. These he was wont to leave behind, when the moment arrived for a sudden departure from his temporary abode; so that, as Hogg remarks, a fine library might have been formed from the waifs and strays of his collections scattered over the three kingdoms. This quiet course of life was diversified by short rambles in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, and by many episodes related with Hogg's caustic humour. On the whole, the impression left upon the reader's mind is that Shelley and Harriet were very happy together at this period, and that Harriet was a charming and sweet-tempered girl, somewhat too much given to the study of trite ethics, and slightly deficient in sensibility, but otherwise a fit and soothing companion for the poet.

They were not, however, content to remain in Edinburgh. Hogg was obliged to leave that city, in order to resume his law studies at York, and Shelley's programme of life at this period imperatively required the society of his chosen comrade. It was therefore decided that the three friends should settle at York, to remain "for ever" in each other's company. They started in a post-chaise, the good Harriet reading aloud novels by the now forgotten Holcroft with untiring energy, to charm the tedium of the journey. At York more than one cloud obscured their triune felicity. In the first place they were unfortunate in their choice of lodgings. In the second Shelley found himself obliged to take an expensive journey southward, in the fruitless attempt to come to some terms with his father's lawyer, Mr. Whitton. Sir Bysshe and Mr. Shelley were anxious to bind the erratic poet down to a settlement of the estates, which, on their own death, would pass into the latter's absolute control. They suggested numerous arrangements; and not long after the date of Shelley's residence in York, it was proposed to make him an immediate allowance of 2000*l.*, if Shelley would but consent to entail the land on his heirs male. This offer was indignantly refused. Shelley recognized the truth that property is a trust far more than a possession, and would do nothing to tie up so much command over labour, such incalculable potentialities of social good or evil, for an unborn being of whose opinions he knew nothing. This is only one among many instances of his readiness to sacrifice ease, comfort, nay, the bare necessities of life, for principle.

On his return to York, Shelley found a new inmate established in their lodgings. The incomparable Eliza, who was henceforth doomed to guide his destinies to an obscure catastrophe, had arrived from London. Harriet

believed her sister to be a paragon of beauty, good sense, and propriety. She obeyed her elder sister like a mother; never questioned her wisdom; and foolishly allowed her to interpose between herself and her husband. Hogg had been told before her first appearance in the friendly circle that Eliza was "beautiful, exquisitely beautiful; an elegant figure, full of grace; her face was lovely,—dark, bright eyes; jet-black hair, glossy; a crop upon which she bestowed the care it merited,—almost all her time; and she was so sensible, so amiable, so good!" Now let us listen to the account he has himself transmitted of this woman, whom certainly he did not love, and to whom poor Shelley had afterwards but little reason to feel gratitude. "She was older than I had expected, and she looked much older than she was. The lovely face was seamed with the small-pox, and of a dead white, as faces so much marked and scarred commonly are; as white indeed as a mass of boiled rice, but of a dingy hue, like rice boiled in dirty water. The eyes were dark, but dull, and without meaning; the hair was black and glossy, but coarse; and there was the admired crop—a long crop, much like the tail of a horse—a switch tail. The fine figure was meagre, prim, and constrained. The beauty, the grace, and the elegance existed, no doubt, in their utmost perfection, but only in the imagination of her partial young sister. Her father, as Harriet told me, was familiarly called 'Jew Westbrook,' and Eliza greatly resembled one of the dark-eyed daughters of Judah."

This portrait is drawn, no doubt, with an unfriendly hand; and, in Hogg's biography, each of its sarcastic touches is sustained with merciless reiteration, whenever the mention of Eliza's name is necessary. We hear, more-

over, how she taught the blooming Harriet to fancy that she was the victim of her nerves, how she checked her favourite studies, and how she ruled the household by continual reference to a Mrs. Grundy of her earlier experience. "What would Miss Warne say?" was as often on her lips, if we may credit Hogg, as the brush and comb were in her hands.

The intrusion of Eliza disturbed the harmony of Shelley's circle; but we know now that there were deeper reasons for the abrupt departure which he made from York with his wife and her sister in November, 1811. It has recently been proved beyond all doubt that Shelley had good cause to resent Hogg's undue familiarity with Harriet; and though he forgave this faithless friend, he felt the necessity of removing his wife from inconvenient surroundings. They quitted York without giving Hogg notice of their projected departure.¹

The destination of the travellers was Keswick. Here they engaged lodgings for a time, and then moved into a furnished house. At Chesnut Cottage occurred one of those mysterious incidents which perplex Shelley's biographers. He declared he had been attacked one night by a man bent on burglary or murder. Probably Shelley was attracted to the lake country as much by the celebrated men who lived there, as by the beauty of its scenery, and the cheapness of its accommodation. He had long entertained an admiration for Southey's poetry, and was now beginning to study Wordsworth and Coleridge. But if he hoped for much companionship with the literary lions of the lakes, he was disappointed. Coleridge was absent, and missed making his acquaintance—a circumstance he afterwards regretted, saying that he could have been more useful to the young

¹ See Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. pp. 190-194.

poet and metaphysician than Southey. De Quincey, though he writes ambiguously upon this point, does not seem to have met Shelley. Wordsworth paid him no attention; and though he saw a good deal of Southey, this intimacy changed Shelley's early liking for the man and poet into something like contempt. It was not likely that the calm methodical student, the mechanical versifier, and the political convert, who had outlived all his earlier illusions, should retain the goodwill of such an Ariel as Shelley, in whose brain *Queen Mab* was already simmering. Life at Keswick began to be monotonous. It was, however, enlivened by a visit to the Duke of Norfolk's seat, Greystoke. Shelley spent his last guinea on the trip; but though the ladies of his family enjoyed the honour of some days passed in ducal hospitalities, the visit was not fruitful of results. The Duke at this time kindly did his best, but without success, to bring about a reconciliation between his old friend, the member for Horsham, and his rebellious son.

Another important incident of the Keswick residence was Shelley's letter to William Godwin, whose work on Political Justice he had studied with unbounded admiration. He never spoke of this book without respect in after-life, affirming that the perusal of it had turned his attention from romances to questions of public utility. The earliest letter dated to Godwin from Keswick, January 3, 1812, is in many respects remarkable, and not the least so as a specimen of self-delineation. He entreats Godwin to become his guide, philosopher, and friend, urging that "if desire for universal happiness has any claim upon your preference," if persecution and injustice suffered in the cause of philanthropy and truth may commend a young man to William Godwin's regard, he is not unworthy of

this honour. We who have learned to know the flawless purity of Shelley's aspirations, can refrain from smiling at the big generalities of this epistle. Words which to men made callous by long contact with the world, ring false and wake suspicion, were for Shelley but the natural expression of his most abiding mood. Yet Godwin may be pardoned if he wished to know more in detail of the youth, who sought to cast himself upon his care in all the panoply of phrases about philanthropy and universal happiness. Shelley's second letter contains an extraordinary mixture of truth willingly communicated, and of curious romance, illustrating his tendency to colour facts with the hallucinations of an ardent fancy. Of his sincerity there is, I think, no doubt. He really meant what he wrote; and yet we have no reason to believe the statement that he was twice expelled from Eton for disseminating the doctrines of *Political Justice*, or that his father wished to drive him by poverty to accept a commission in some distant regiment, in order that he might prosecute the *Necessity of Atheism* in his absence, procure a sentence of outlawry, and so convey the family estates to his younger brother. The embroidery of bare fact with a tissue of imagination was a peculiarity of Shelley's mind; and this letter may be used as a key for the explanation of many strange occurrences in his biography. What he tells Godwin about his want of love for his father, and his inability to learn from the tutors imposed upon him at Eton and Oxford, represents the simple truth. Only from teachers chosen by himself, and recognized as his superiors by his own deliberate judgment, can he receive instruction. To Godwin he resigns himself with the implicit confidence of admiration. Godwin was greatly struck with this letter. Indeed he must have been "or God or

beast," like the insensible man in Aristotle's *Ethics*, if he could have resisted the devotion of so splendid and high-spirited a nature, poured forth in language at once so vehement and so convincingly sincere. He accepted the responsible post of Shelley's Mentor; and thus began a connexion which proved not only a source of moral support and intellectual guidance to the poet, but was also destined to end in a closer personal tie between the two illustrious men.

In his second letter Shelley told Godwin that he was then engaged in writing "An inquiry into the causes of the failure of the French Revolution to benefit mankind," adding, "My plan is that of resolving to lose no opportunity to disseminate truth and happiness." Godwin sensibly replied that Shelley was too young to set himself up as a teacher and apostle: but his pupil did not take the hint. A third letter (Jan. 16, 1812) contains this startling announcement: "In a few days we set off to Dublin. I do not know exactly where, but a letter addressed to Keswick will find me. Our journey has been settled some time. We go principally *to forward as much as we can* the Catholic Emancipation." In a fourth letter (Jan. 28, 1812) he informs Godwin that he has already prepared an address to the Catholics of Ireland, and combats the dissuasions of his counsellor with ingenious arguments to prove that his contemplated expedition can do no harm, and may be fruitful of great good.

It appears that for some time past Shelley had devoted his attention to Irish politics. The persecution of Mr. Peter Finnerty, an Irish journalist and editor of *The Press* newspaper, who had been sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment in Lincoln jail (between Feb. 7, 1811, and Aug. 7, 1812) for plain speech about Lord Castlereagh,

roused his hottest indignation. He published a poem, as yet unrecovered, for his benefit ; the proceeds of the sale amounting, it is said, to nearly one hundred pounds.¹ The young enthusiast, who was attempting a philosophic study of the French Revolution, whose heart was glowing with universal philanthropy, and who burned to disseminate truth and happiness, judged that Ireland would be a fitting field for making a first experiment in practical politics. Armed with the MS. of his *Address to the Irish People*,² he set sail with Harriet and Eliza on the 3rd of February from Whitehaven. They touched the Isle of Man ; and after a very stormy passage, which drove them to the north coast of Ireland, and forced them to complete their journey by land, the party reached Dublin travel-worn, but with unabated spirit, on the 12th. Harriet shared her husband's philanthropical enthusiasm. "My wife," wrote Shelley to Godwin, "is the partner of my thoughts and feelings." Indeed, there is abundant proof in both his letters and hers, about this period, that they felt and worked together. Miss Westbrook, meantime, ruled the household ; "Eliza keeps our common stock of money for safety in some nook or corner of her dress, but we are not dependent on her, although she gives it out as we want it." This master-touch of unconscious delineation tells us all we need to know about the domestic party now established in 7, Lower Sackville Street. Before a week had passed, the *Address to the Irish People* had been printed. Shelley and Harriet immediately engaged their whole energies in the task of distribution. It was advertised for sale ; but that alone seemed insufficient.

¹ McCarthy, p. 255.

² It was published in Dublin. See reprint in McCarthy, p. 179.

On the 27th of February Shelley wrote to a friend in England: "I have already sent 400 of my Irish pamphlets into the world, and they have excited a sensation of wonder in Dublin. Eleven hundred yet remain for distribution. Copies have been sent to sixty public-houses. . . . Expectation is on the tiptoe. I send a man out every day to distribute copies, with instructions where and how to give them. His account corresponds with the multitudes of people who possess them. I stand at the balcony of our window and watch till I see a man *who looks likely*. I throw a book to him."

A postscript to this letter lets us see the propaganda from Harriet's point of view. "I am sure you would laugh were you to see us give the pamphlets. We throw them out of window, and give them to men that we pass in the streets. For myself, I am ready to die of laughter when it is done, and Percy looks so grave. Yesterday he put one into a woman's hood of a cloak."

The purpose of this address was to rouse the Irish people to a sense of their real misery, to point out that Catholic Emancipation and a Repeal of the Union Act were the only radical remedies for their wrongs, and to teach them the spirit in which they should attempt a revolution. On the last point Shelley felt intensely. The whole address aims at the inculcation of a noble moral temper, tolerant, peaceful, resolute, rational, and self-denying. Considered as a treatise on the principles which should govern patriots during a great national crisis, the document is admirable: and if the inhabitants of Dublin had been a population of Shelleys, its effect might have been permanent and overwhelming. The mistake lay in supposing that a people whom the poet himself described as "of scarcely greater elevation in the scale of intellectual

being than the oyster," were qualified to take the remedy of their grievances into their own hands, or were amenable to such sound reasoning as he poured forth. He told Godwin that he had "wilfully vulgarized the language of this pamphlet, in order to reduce the remarks it contains to the taste and comprehension of the Irish peasantry." A few extracts will enable the reader to judge how far he had succeeded in this aim. I select such as seem to me most valuable for the light they throw upon his own opinions. "All religions are good which make men good; and the way that a person ought to prove that his method of worshipping God is best, is for himself to be better than all other men." "A Protestant is my brother, and a Catholic is my brother." "Do not inquire if a man be a heretic, if he be a Quaker, a Jew, or a heathen; but if he be a virtuous man, if he loves liberty and truth, if he wish the happiness and peace of human kind. If a man be ever so much a believer and love not these things, he is a heartless hypocrite, a rascal, and a knave." "It is not a merit to tolerate, but it is a crime to be intolerant." "Anything short of unlimited toleration and complete charity with all men, on which you will recollect that Jesus Christ principally insisted, is wrong." "Be calm, mild, deliberate, patient. . . . Think and talk and discuss. . . . Be free and be happy, but first be wise and good." Proceeding to recommend the formation of associations, he condemns secret and violent societies; "Be fair, open, and you will be terrible to your enemies." "Habits of SOBERITY, REGULARITY, and THOUGHT must be entered into and firmly resolved upon." Then follow precepts, which Shelley no doubt regarded as practical, for the purification of private morals, and the regulation of public discussion by the masses whom he elsewhere

recognized as "thousands huddled together, one mass of animated filth."

The foregoing extracts show that Shelley was in no sense an inflammatory demagogue ; however visionary may have been the hopes he indulged, he based those hopes upon the still more Utopian foundation of a sudden ethical reform, and preached a revolution without bloodshed. We find in them, moreover, the germs of *The Revolt of Islam*, where the hero plays the part successfully in fiction, which the poet had attempted without appreciable result in practice at Dublin. The same principles guided Shelley at a still later period. When he wrote his *Masque of Anarchy*, he bade the people of England to assemble by thousands, strong in the truth and justice of their cause, invincible in peaceful opposition to force.

While he was sowing his Address broadcast in the streets of Dublin, Shelley was engaged in preparing a second pamphlet on the subject of Catholic Emancipation. It was entitled *Proposals for an Association*, and advocated in serious and temperate phrase the formation of a vast society, binding all the Catholic patriots of Ireland together, for the recovery of their rights. In estimating Shelley's political sagacity, it must be remembered that Catholic Emancipation has since his day been brought about by the very measure he proposed and under the conditions he foresaw. Speaking of the English Government in his Address, he used these simple phrases :—" It wants altering and mending. It will be mended, and a reform of English Government will produce good to the Irish." These sentences were prophetic ; and perhaps they are destined to be even more so.

With a view to presenting at one glance Shelley's position as a practical politician, I shall anticipate the course

of a few years, and compare his Irish pamphlets with an essay published in 1817, under the title of *A Proposal for putting Reform to the Vote throughout the Kingdom*. He saw that the House of Commons did not represent the country; and acting upon his principle that government is the servant of the governed, he sought means for ascertaining the real will of the nation with regard to its Parliament, and for bringing the collective opinion of the population to bear upon its rulers. The plan proposed was that a huge network of committees should be formed, and that by their means every individual man should be canvassed. We find here the same method of advancing reform by peaceable associations as in Ireland. How moderate were his own opinions with regard to the franchise, is proved by the following sentence:—"With respect to Universal Suffrage, I confess I consider its adoption, in the present unprepared state of public knowledge and feeling, a measure fraught with peril. I think that none but those who register their names as paying a certain small sum in *direct taxes* ought at present to send members to Parliament." As in the case of Ireland, so in that of England, subsequent events have shown that Shelley's hopes were not exaggerated.

While the Shelleys were in Dublin, a meeting of the Irish Catholics was announced for the evening of Feb. 28. It was held in Fishamble Street Theatre; and here Shelley made his *début* as an orator. He spoke for about an hour; and his speech was, on the whole, well received, though it raised some hisses at the beginning by his remarks upon Roman Catholicism. There is no proof that Shelley, though eloquent in conversation, was a powerful public speaker. The somewhat conflicting accounts we have received of this, his maiden effort, tend to the im-

pression that he failed to carry his audience with him. The dissemination of his pamphlets had, however, raised considerable interest in his favour; and he was welcomed by the press as an Englishman of birth and fortune, who wished well to the Irish cause. His youth told somewhat against him. It was difficult to take the strong words of the beardless boy at their real value; and as though to aggravate this drawback, his Irish servant, Daniel Hill, an efficient agent in the dissemination of the Address, affirmed that his master was fifteen—four years less than his real age.

In Dublin Shelley made acquaintance with Curran, whose jokes and dirty stories he could not appreciate, and with a Mr. Lawless, who began a history of the Irish people in concert with the young philosopher. We also obtain, from one of Harriet's letters, a somewhat humorous peep at another of their friends, a patriotic Mrs. Nugent, who supported herself by working in a furrier's shop, and who is described as "sitting in the room now, and talking to Percy about Virtue." After less than two months' experience of his Irish propaganda, Shelley came to the conclusion that he "had done all that he could." The population of Dublin had not risen to the appeal of their Laon with the rapidity he hoped for; and accordingly upon the 4th of April he once more embarked with his family for Holyhead. In after-days it was hinted that the police had given him warning that it would be well for him to leave Dublin; but, though the danger of a prosecution was not wholly visionary, this intimation does not seem to have been made. Before he quitted Ireland, however, he despatched a box containing the remaining copies of his *Address and Proposals*, together with the recently printed edition of another manifesto, called a *Declaration of*



Rights, to a friend in Sussex. This box was delayed at the Holyhead custom-house, and opened. Its contents gave serious anxiety to the Surveyor of Customs, who communicated the astonishing discovery through the proper official channels to the government. After some correspondence, the authorities decided to take no steps against Shelley, and the box was forwarded to its destination.

The friend in question was a Miss Eliza Hitchener, of Hurstpierpoint, who kept a sort of school, and who had attracted Shelley's favourable notice by her advanced political and religious opinions. Though he had barely made her personal acquaintance, his correspondence with this lady, still fortunately extant, was enthusiastic and voluminous. How recklessly he entered into serious entanglements with people whom he had not learned to know, may be gathered from these extracts:—"We will meet you in Wales, and never part again. It will not do. In compliance with Harriet's earnest solicitations, I entreated you instantly to come and join our circle, resign your school, all, everything for us and the Irish cause." "I ought to count myself a favoured mortal with such a wife and such a friend." Harriet addressed this lady as "Portia;" and it is an undoubted fact that soon after their return to England, Miss Hitchener formed one of their permanent family circle. Her entrance into it and her exit from it at no very distant period are, however, both obscure. Before long she acquired another name than Portia in the Shelley household, and now she is better known to fame as the "Brown Demon." Eliza Westbrook took a strong dislike to her; Harriet followed suit; and Shelley himself found that he had liked her better at a distance than in close companionship. She had at last to be bought off or bribed to leave.

The scene now shifts with bewildering frequency; nor is it easy to trace the Shelleys in their rapid flight. About the 21st of April, they settled for a short time at Nantgwilt, near Rhayader, in North Wales. Ere long we find them at Lynmouth on the Somersetshire coast. Here Shelley continued his political propaganda, by circulating the *Declaration of Rights*, whereof mention has already been made. It was, as Mr. W. M. Rossetti first pointed out, a manifesto concerning the ends of government and the rights of man,—framed in imitation of two similar French Revolutionary documents, issued by the Constituent Assembly in August, 1789, and by Robespierre in April, 1793.¹ Shelley used to seal this pamphlet in bottles and set it afloat upon the sea, hoping perhaps that after this wise it would traverse St. George's Channel and reach the sacred soil of Erin. He also employed his servant, Daniel Hill, to distribute it among the Somersetshire farmers. On the 19th of August this man was arrested in the streets of Barnstaple, and sentenced to six months' imprisonment for uttering a seditious pamphlet; and the remaining copies of the *Declaration of Rights* were destroyed. In strong contrast with the puerility of these proceedings, is the grave and lofty *Letter to Lord Ellenborough*, composed at Lynmouth, and printed at Barnstaple.² A printer, named D. J. Eaton, had recently been sentenced to imprisonment by his Lordship for publishing the Third Part of Paine's *Age of Reason*. Shelley's epistle is an eloquent argument in favour of toleration and the freedom of the intellect, carrying the matter beyond the instance of legal tyranny which occasioned its compo-

¹ Reprinted in McCarthy, p. 324.

² Reprinted in Lady Shelley's Memorials, p. 29.

sition, and treating it with philosophic, if impassioned seriousness.

An extract from this composition will serve to show his power of handling weighty English prose, while yet a youth of hardly twenty. I have chosen a passage bearing on his theological opinions :—

Moral qualities are such as only a human being can possess. To attribute them to the Spirit of the Universe, or to suppose that it is capable of altering them, is to degrade God into man, and to annex to this incomprehensible Being qualities incompatible with any possible definition of his nature.

It may be here objected : Ought not the Creator to possess the perfections of the creature ? No. To attribute to God the moral qualities of man, is to suppose him susceptible of passions, which arising out of corporeal organization, it is plain that a pure spirit cannot possess. . . . But even suppose, with the vulgar, that God is a venerable old man, seated on a throne of clouds, his breast the theatre of various passions, analogous to those of humanity, his will changeable and uncertain as that of an earthly king ; still, goodness and justice are qualities seldom nominally denied him, and it will be admitted that he disapproves of any action incompatible with those qualities. Persecution for opinion is unjust. With what consistency, then, can the worshippers of a Deity whose benevolence they boast, embitter the existence of their fellow-being, because his ideas of that Deity are different from those which they entertain ? Alas ! there is no consistency in those persecutors who worship a benevolent Deity ; those who worship a demon would alone act consonantly to these principles by imprisoning and torturing in his name.

Shelley had more than once urged Godwin and his family to visit him. The sage of Skinner Street thought that now was a convenient season. Accordingly he travelled by coach through Bristol and Chepstow to Lynmouth, where he found that the Shelleys had fittted a few days previously without giving any notice. This fruitless journey of the poet's Mentor is humorously described by Hogg, as well as one undertaken by himself in the following year to

Dublin with a similar result. The Shelleys were now established at Tan-yr-allt, near Tremadoc, in North Wales, on an estate belonging to Mr. W. A. Madocks, M.P. for Boston. This gentleman had reclaimed a considerable extent of marshy ground from the sea, and protected it with an embankment. Shelley, whose interest in the poor people around him was always keen and practical, lost no time in making their acquaintance at Tremadoc. The work of utility carried out by his landlord aroused his enthusiastic admiration; and when the embankment was imperilled by a heavy sea, he got up a subscription for its preservation. Heading the list with 100*l.*, how raised, or whether paid, we know not, he endeavoured to extract similar sums from the neighbouring gentry, and even ran up with Harriet to London to use his influence for the same purpose with the Duke of Norfolk. On this occasion he made the personal acquaintance of the Godwin family.

Life at Tanyrallt was smooth and studious, except for the diversion caused by the peril to the embankment. We hear of Harriet continuing her Latin studies, reading Odes of Horace, and projecting an epistle in that language to Hogg. Shelley, as usual, collected many books around him. There are letters extant in which he writes to London for Spinoza and Kant, Plato, and the works of the chief Greek historians. It appears that at this period, under the influence of Godwin, he attempted to conquer a strong natural dislike for history. "I am determined to apply myself to a study which is hateful and disgusting to my very soul, but which is above all studies necessary for him who would be listened to as a mender of antiquated abuses,—I mean, that record of crimes and miseries—history." Although he may have made an effort to apply

himself to historical reading, he was not successful. His true bias inclined him to metaphysics coloured by a glowing fancy, and to poetry penetrated with speculative enthusiasm. In the historic sense he was deficient; and when he made a serious effort at a later period to compose a tragedy upon the death of Charles I., this work was taken up with reluctance, continued with effort, and finally abandoned.

In the same letters he speaks about a collection of short poems on which he was engaged, and makes frequent allusions to *Queen Mab*. It appears from his own assertion, and from Medwin's biography, that a poem on Queen Mab had been projected and partially written by him at the early age of eighteen. But it was not taken seriously in hand until the spring of 1812; nor was it finished and printed before 1813. The first impression was a private issue of 250 copies, on fine paper, which Shelley distributed to people whom he wished to influence. It was pirated soon after its appearance, and again in 1821 it was given to the public by a bookseller named Clarke. Against the latter republication Shelley energetically protested, disclaiming in a letter addressed to *The Examiner*, from Pisa, June 22, 1821, any interest in a production which he had not even seen for several years. "I doubt not but that it is perfectly worthless in point of literary composition; and that in all that concerns moral and political speculation, as well as in the subtler discriminations of metaphysical and religious doctrine, it is still more crude and immature. I am a devoted enemy to religious, political, and domestic oppression; and I regret this publication, not so much from literary vanity as because I fear it is better fitted to injure than to serve the sacred cause of

freedom." This judgment is undoubtedly severe; but, though exaggerated in its condemnation, it, like all Shelley's criticisms on his own works, expresses the truth. We cannot include *Queen Mab*, in spite of its sonorous rhetoric and fervid declamation, in the canon of his masterpieces. It had a *succès de scandale* on its first appearance, and fatally injured Shelley's reputation. As a work of art it lacks maturity and permanent vitality.

The Shelleys were suddenly driven away from Tanyralt by a mysterious occurrence, of which no satisfactory explanation has yet been given. According to letters written by himself and Harriet soon after the event, and confirmed by the testimony of Eliza, Shelley was twice attacked upon the night of Feb. 26, by an armed ruffian, with whom he struggled in a hand-to-hand combat. Pistols were fired and windows broken, and Shelley's nightgown was shot through: but the assassin made his escape from the house without being recognized. His motive and his personality still remain matters of conjecture. Whether the whole affair was a figment of Shelley's brain, rendered more than usually susceptible by laudanum taken to assuage intense physical pain; whether it was a perilous hoax played upon him by the Irish servant, Daniel Hill; or whether, as he himself surmised, the crime was instigated by an unfriendly neighbour, it is impossible to say. Strange adventures of this kind, blending fact and fancy in a now inextricable tangle, are of no unfrequent occurrence in Shelley's biography. In estimating the relative proportions of the two factors in this case, it must be borne in mind, on the one hand, that no one but Shelley, who was alone in the parlour, and who for some unexplained reason had loaded his pistols on the evening before the alleged assault, professed to have seen

the villain ; and, on the other, that the details furnished by Harriet, and confirmed at a subsequent period by so hostile a witness as Eliza, are too circumstantial to be lightly set aside.

On the whole it appears most probable that Shelley on this night was the subject of a powerful hallucination. The theory of his enemies at Tanyrallt, that the story had been invented to facilitate his escape from the neighbourhood without paying his bills, may be dismissed. But no investigation on the spot could throw any clear light on the circumstance, and Shelley's friends, Hogg, Peacock, and Mr. Madocks, concurred in regarding the affair as a delusion.

There was no money in the common purse of the Shelleys at this moment. In their distress they applied to Mr. T. Hookham, a London publisher, who sent them enough to carry them across the Irish Channel. After a short residence in 35, Cuffe Street, Dublin, and a flying visit to Killarney, they returned to London. Eliza, for some reason as unexplained as the whole episode of this second visit to Ireland, was left behind for a short season. The flight from Tanyrallt closes the first important period of Shelley's life ; and his settlement in London marks the beginning of another, fruitful of the gravest consequences and decisive for his future.

CHAPTER IV.

SECOND RESIDENCE IN LONDON, AND SEPARATION FROM HARRIET.

EARLY in April the Shelleys arrived in London, where they were soon joined by Eliza, from whose increasingly irksome companionship the poet had recently enjoyed a few weeks' respite. After living for a short while in hotels, they took lodgings in Half Moon Street. The house had a projecting window, where the poet loved to sit with book in hand, and catch, according to his custom, the maximum of sunlight granted by a chary English summer. "He wanted," said one of his female admirers, "only a pan of clear water and a fresh turf to look like some young lady's lark, hanging outside for air and song." According to Hogg, this period of London life was a pleasant and tranquil episode in Shelley's troubled career. His room was full of books, among which works of German metaphysics occupied a prominent place, though they were not deeply studied. He was now learning Italian, and made his first acquaintance with Tasso, Ariosto, and Petrarch.

The habits of the household were, to say the least, irregular; for Shelley took no thought of sublunary matters, and Harriet was an indifferent housekeeper. Dinner seems to have come to them less by forethought than by the operation of divine chance; and when there

was no meat provided for the entertainment of casual guests, the table was supplied with buns, procured by Shelley from the nearest pastry-cook. He had already abjured animal food and alcohol; and his favourite diet consisted of pulse or bread, which he ate dry with water, or made into panada. Hogg relates how, when he was walking in the streets and felt hungry, he would dive into a baker's shop and emerge with a loaf tucked under his arm. This he consumed as he went along, very often reading at the same time, and dodging the foot-passengers with the rapidity of movement which distinguished him. He could not comprehend how any man should want more than bread. "I have dropped a word, a hint," says Hogg, "about a pudding; a pudding, Bysshe said dogmatically, is a prejudice." This indifference to diet was highly characteristic of Shelley. During the last years of his life, even when he was suffering from the frequent attacks of a painful disorder, he took no heed of food; and his friend, Trelawny, attributes the derangement of his health, in a great measure, to this carelessness. Mrs. Shelley used to send him something to eat into the room where he habitually studied; but the plate frequently remained untouched for hours upon a bookshelf, and at the end of the day he might be heard asking, "Mary, have I dined?" His dress was no less simple than his diet. Hogg says that he never saw him in a great coat, and that his collar was unbuttoned to let the air play freely on his throat. "In the street or road he reluctantly wore a hat; but in fields and gardens, his little round head had no other covering than his long, wild, ragged locks." Shelley's head, as is well known, was remarkably small and round; he used to plunge it several times a day in cold water, and expose it recklessly to the intensest heat of fire or sun.

Mrs. Shelley relates that a great part of the *Cenci* was written on their house-roof near Leghorn, where Shelley lay exposed to the unmitigated ardour of Italian summer heat; and Hogg describes him reading Homer by a blazing fire-light, or roasting his skull upon the hearth-rug by the hour.

These personal details cannot be omitted by the biographer of such a man as Shelley. He was an elemental and primeval creature, as little subject to the laws of custom in his habits as in his modes of thought, living literally as the spirit moved him, with a natural non-chalance that has perhaps been never surpassed. To time and place he was equally indifferent, and could not be got to remember his engagements. "He took strange caprices, unfounded frights and dislikes, vain apprehensions and panic terrors, and therefore he absented himself from formal and sacred engagements. He was unconscious and oblivious of times, places, persons, and seasons; and falling into some poetic vision, some day-dream, he quickly and completely forgot all that he had repeatedly and solemnly promised; or he ran away after some object of imaginary urgency and importance, which suddenly came into his head, setting off in vain pursuit of it, he knew not whither. When he was caught, brought up in custody, and turned over to the ladies, with, Behold, your King! to be caressed, courted, admired, and flattered, the king of beauty and fancy would too commonly bolt; slip away, steal out, creep off; unobserved and almost magically he vanished; thus mysteriously depriving his fair subjects of his much-coveted, long looked-for company." If he had been fairly caged and found himself in congenial company, he let time pass unheeded, sitting up all night to talk, and chaining his audience by the spell of his unri-

valled eloquence ; for wonderful as was his poetry, those who enjoyed the privilege of converse with him, judged it even more attractive. "He was commonly most communicative, unreserved, and eloquent, and enthusiastic, when those around him were inclining to yield to the influence of sleep, or rather at the hour when they would have been disposed to seek their chambers, but for the bewitching charms of his discourse."

From Half Moon Street the Shelleys moved into a house in Pimlico ; and it was here, according to Hogg, whose narrative can probably be relied on in this matter, that Shelley's first child, Ianthe Eliza, was born about the end of June, 1813. Harriet did not take much to her little girl, and gave her over to a wet-nurse, for whom Shelley conceived a great dislike. That a mother should not nurse her own baby was no doubt contrary to his principles ; and the double presence of the servant and Eliza, whom he now most cordially detested, made his home uncomfortable. We have it on excellent authority, that of Mr. Peacock, that he "was extremely fond of it (the child), and would walk up and down a room with it in his arms for a long time together, singing to it a song of his own making, which ran on the repetition of a word of his own coining. His song was Yáhmani, Yáhmani, Yáhmani, Yáhmani." To the want of sympathy between the father and the mother in this matter of Ianthe, Mr. Peacock is inclined to attribute the beginning of troubles in the Shelley household. There is, indeed, no doubt that the revelation of Harriet's maternal coldness must have been extremely painful to her husband ; and how far she carried her insensibility, may be gathered from a story told by Hogg about her conduct during an operation performed upon the child.

During this period of his sojourn in London, Shelley was again in some pecuniary difficulties. Yet he indulged Harriet's vanity by setting up a carriage, in which they afterwards took a hurried journey to Edinburgh and back. He narrowly escaped a debtor's prison through this act of extravagance, and by a somewhat ludicrous mistake Hogg was arrested for the debt due to the coachmaker. His acquaintances were few and scattered, and he saw nothing of his family. Gradually, however, he seems to have become a kind of prophet in a coterie of learned ladies. The views he had propounded in *Queen Mab*, his passionate belief in the perfectibility of man, his vegetarian doctrines, and his readiness to adopt any new nostrum for the amelioration of the race, endeared him to all manners of strange people; nor was he deterred by aristocratic prejudices from frequenting society which proved extremely uncongenial to Hogg, and of which we have accordingly some caustic sketches from his pen. His chief friends were a Mrs. Boinville, for whom he conceived an enthusiastic admiration, her sister Mrs. Newton, and her daughter Cornelia, Mrs. Turner. In order to be near them he had moved to Pimlico; and his next move, from London to a cottage named High Elms, at Bracknell, in Berkshire, had the same object. With Godwin and his family he was also on terms of familiar intercourse. Under the philosopher's roof in Skinner Street there was now gathered a group of miscellaneous inmates—Fanny Imlay, the daughter of his first wife, Mary Wollstonecraft; Mary, his own daughter by the same marriage; his second wife, and her two children, Claire and Charles Clairmont, the offspring of a previous union. From this connexion with the Godwin household events of the most serious import in the future were destined to arise, and already it appears

that Fanny Imlay had begun to look with perilous approval on the fascinating poet. Hogg and Mr. Peacock, the well-known novelist, described by Mrs. Newton as "a cold scholar, who, I think, has neither taste nor feeling," were his only other intimates.

Mrs. Newton's unfair judgment of Mr. Peacock marks a discord between the two main elements of Shelley's present society; and indeed it will appear to a careful student of his biography that Hogg, Peacock, and Harriet, now stood somewhat by themselves and aloof from the inner sphere of his associates. If we regard the Shelleys as the centre of an extended line, we shall find the Westbrook family at one end, the Boinville family at the other, with Hogg and Peacock somewhere in the middle. Harriet was naturally drawn to the Westbrook extremity, and Shelley to the Boinville. Peacock had no affinity for either, but a sincere regard for Harriet as well as for her husband; while Hogg was in much the same position, except that he had made friends with Mrs. Newton. The Godwins, of great importance to Shelley himself, exercised their influence at a distance from the rest. Frequent changes from Bracknell to London and back again, varied by the flying journey to Edinburgh, and a last visit paid in strictest secrecy to his mother and sisters, at Field Place, of which a very interesting record is left in the narrative of Mr. Kennedy, occupied the interval between July, 1813, and March, 1814. The period was not productive of literary masterpieces. We only hear of a *Refutation of Deism*, a dialogue between Eusebes and Theosophus, which attacked all forms of Theistic belief.

Since we are now approaching the gravest crisis in Shelley's life, it behoves us to be more than usually

careful in considering his circumstances at this epoch. His home had become cold and dull. Harriet had lost her interest in his studies. She became more and more an ordinary woman of the world. Eliza was a source of continual irritation, and the Westbrook family did its best, by interference and suggestion, to refrigerate the poet's feelings for his wife. On the other hand he found among the Boinville set exactly that high-flown, enthusiastic, sentimental atmosphere which suited his idealizing temper. Two extracts from a letter written to Hogg upon the 16th of March, 1814, speak more eloquently than any analysis, and will place before the reader the antagonism which had sprung up in Shelley's mind between his own home and the circle of his new friends:—"I have been staying with Mrs. B—— for the last month; I have escaped, in the society of all that philosophy and friendship combine, from the dismaying solitude of myself. They have revived in my heart the expiring flame of life. I have felt myself translated to a paradise, which has nothing of mortality but its transitoriness; my heart sickens at the view of that necessity, which will quickly divide me from the delightful tranquillity of this happy home,—for it has become my home. The trees, the bridge, the minutest objects, have already a place in my affections."

"Eliza is still with us,—not here!—but will be with me when the infinite malice of destiny forces me to depart. I am now but little inclined to contest this point. I certainly hate her with all my heart and soul. It is a sight which awakens an inexpressible sensation of disgust and horror, to see her caress my poor little Ianthe, in whom I may hereafter find the consolation of sympathy. I sometimes feel faint with the fatigue of checking the overflowings of my unbounded abhorrence for this miserable

wretch. But she is no more than a blind and loathsome worm, that cannot see to sting."¹

[While divided in this way between a home which had become distasteful to him, and a house where he found scope for his most romantic outpourings of sensibility, Shelley fell suddenly and passionately in love with Godwin's daughter, Mary. Peacock, who lived in close intimacy with him at this period, must deliver his testimony as to the overwhelming nature of the new attachment:—"Nothing that I ever read in tale or history could present a more striking image of a sudden, violent, irresistible, uncontrollable passion, than that under which I found him labouring when, at his request, I went up from the country to call on him in London. Between his old feelings towards Harriet, *from whom he was not then separated*, and his new passion for Mary, he showed in his looks, in his gestures, in his speech, the state of a mind 'suffering, like a little kingdom, the nature of an insurrection.' His eyes were bloodshot, his hair and dress disordered. He caught up a bottle of laudanum, and said, 'I never part from this.'"

We may therefore affirm, I think, with confidence that in the winter and spring of 1814, Shelley had been becoming gradually more and more estranged from Harriet, whose commonplace nature was no mate for his, and whom he had never loved with all the depth of his affection; that his intimacy with the Boinville family had brought into painful prominence whatever was jarring and repugnant to him in his home; and that in this crisis of his fate he had fallen in love for the first time seriously with Mary Godwin. She was then a girl of sixteen, "fair and fair-

¹ This and the next four pages have to be rewritten since the appearance of Professor Dowden's Life. See Appendix.

haired, pale indeed, and with a piercing look," to quote Hogg's description of her, as she first appeared before him on the 8th or 9th of June, 1814. With her freedom from prejudice, her tense and high-wrought sensibility, her acute intellect, enthusiasm for ideas, and vivid imagination, Mary Godwin was naturally a fitter companion for Shelley than the good Harriet, however beautiful.

That Shelley early in 1814 had no intention of leaving his wife, is probable; for he was re-married to her on the 24th of March, eight days after his impassioned letter to Hogg, in St. George's, Hanover Square. Harriet was pregnant, and this ratification of the Scotch marriage was no doubt intended to place the legitimacy of a possible heir beyond all question. Yet it seems, if we may found conjecture on "Stanzas, April, 1814," that in the very month after this new ceremony Shelley found the difficulties of his wedded life insuperable, and that he was already making up his mind to part from Harriet. About the middle of June the separation actually occurred—not by mutual consent, so far as any published documents throw light upon the matter, but rather by Shelley's sudden abandonment of his wife and child.¹ For a short while Harriet was left in ignorance of his abode, and with a very insufficient sum of money at her disposal. She placed herself under the protection of her father, retired to Bath, and about the beginning of July received a letter from Shelley, who was thenceforth solicitous for her welfare, keeping up a correspondence with her, supplying her with funds, and by no means shrinking from personal communications.

¹ Leigh Hunt, *Autob.* p. 236, and Medwin, however, both assert that it was by mutual consent. The whole question must be studied in Peacock and in Garnett, *Relics of Shelley*, p. 117.

That Shelley must bear the responsibility of this separation seems to me quite clear. His justification is to be found in his avowed opinions on the subject of love and marriage—opinions which Harriet knew well and professed to share, and of which he had recently made ample confession in the notes to *Queen Mab*. The world will still agree with Lord Eldon in regarding those opinions as dangerous to society, and a blot upon the poet's character; but it would be unfair, while condemning them as frankly as he professed them, to blame him also because he did not conform to the opposite code of morals, for which he frequently expressed extreme abhorrence, and which he stigmatized, however wrongly, as the source of the worst social vices. It must be added that the Shelley family in their memorials of the poet, and through their friend, Mr. Richard Garnett, inform us, without casting any slur on Harriet, that documents are extant which will completely vindicate the poet's conduct in this matter. It is therefore but just to await their publication before pronouncing a decided judgment. Meanwhile there remains no doubt about the fact that forty days after leaving Harriet, Shelley departed from London with Mary Godwin, who had consented to share his fortunes. How he plighted his new troth, and won the hand of her who was destined to be his companion for life, may best be told in Lady Shelley's words:—

“His anguish, his isolation, his difference from other men, his gifts of genius and eloquent enthusiasm, made a deep impression on Godwin's daughter Mary, now a girl of sixteen, who had been accustomed to hear Shelley spoken of as something rare and strange. To her, as they met one eventful day in St. Pancras Churchyard, by her mother's grave, Bysshe, in burning words, poured forth the tale of

his wild past—how he had suffered, how he had been misled, and how, if supported by her love, he hoped in future years to enrol his name with the wise and good who had done battle for their fellow-men, and been true through all adverse storms to the cause of humanity. Unhesitatingly, she placed her hand in his, and linked her fortune with his own ; and most truthfully, as the remaining portions of these Memorials will prove, was the pledge of both redeemed. The theories in which the daughter of the authors of *Political Justice*, and of the *Rights of Woman*, had been educated, spared her from any conflict between her duty and her affection. For she was the child of parents whose writings had had for their object to prove that marriage was one among the many institutions which a new era in the history of mankind was about to sweep away. By her father, whom she loved—by the writings of her mother, whom she had been taught to venerate—these doctrines had been rendered familiar to her mind. It was therefore natural that she should listen to the dictates of her own heart, and willingly unite her fate with one who was so worthy of her love."

Soon after her withdrawal to Bath, Harriet gave birth to Shelley's second child, Charles Bysshe, who died in 1826. She subsequently formed another connexion which proved unhappy ; and on the 10th of November, 1816, she committed suicide by drowning herself in the Serpentine. The distance of time between June, 1814, and November, 1816, and the new ties formed by Harriet in this interval, prove that there was no immediate connexion between Shelley's abandonment of his wife and her suicide. She had always entertained the thought of self-destruction, as Hogg, who is no adverse witness in her case, has amply recorded ; and it may be permitted us to suppose that,

finding herself for the second time unhappy in her love, she reverted to a long-since cherished scheme, and cut the knot of life and all its troubles.

So far as this is possible, I have attempted to narrate the most painful episode in Shelley's life as it occurred, without extenuation and without condemnation. Until the papers, mentioned with such insistence by Lady Shelley and Mr. Garnett, are given to the world, it is impossible that the poet should not bear the reproach of heartlessness and inconstancy in this the gravest of all human relations. Such, however, is my belief in the essential goodness of his character, after allowing, as we must do, for the operation of his peculiar principles upon his conduct, that I for my own part am willing to suspend my judgment till the time arrives for his vindication. The language used by Lady Shelley and Mr. Garnett justify us in expecting that that vindication will be as startling as complete. If it is not, they, as pleading for him, will have overshot the mark of prudence.]

On the 28th of July, 1814, Shelley left London with Mary Godwin, who up to this date had remained beneath her father's roof. There was some secrecy in their departure, because they were accompanied by Miss Clairmont, whose mother disapproved of her forming a third in the party. Having made their way to Dover, they crossed the Channel in an open boat, and went at once to Paris. Here they hired a donkey for their luggage, intending to perform the journey across France on foot. Shelley, however, sprained his ankle, and a mule-carriage was provided for the party. In this conveyance they reached the Jura, and entered Switzerland at Neufchatel. Brunnen, on the Lake of Lucerne, was chosen for their residence; and here Shelley began his romantic tale of *The Assassins*,

a portion of which is printed in his prose works. Want of money compelled them, after two days in Uri, to turn their steps homeward; and the back journey was performed upon the Reuss and Rhine. They reached Gravesend, after a bad passage, on the 13th of September. Mrs. Shelley's *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* relates the details of this trip, which was of great importance in forming Shelley's taste and in supplying him with the scenery of river, rock, and mountain, so splendidly utilized in *Alastor*.

The autumn was a period of more than usual money difficulty; but on the 6th of January, 1815, Sir Bysshe died, Percy became the next heir to the baronetcy and the family estates, and an arrangement was made with his father by right of which he received an allowance of 1000*l.* a year. A portion of his income was immediately set apart for Harriet. The winter was passed in London, where Shelley walked a hospital, in order, it is said, to acquire some medical knowledge that might be of service to the poor he visited. His own health at this period was very bad. A physician whom he consulted, pronounced that he was rapidly sinking under pulmonary disease, and he suffered frequent attacks of acute pain. The consumptive symptoms seem to have been so marked that for the next three years he had no doubt that he was destined to an early death. In 1818, however, all danger of phthisis passed away; and during the rest of his short life he only suffered from spasms and violent pains in the side, which baffled the physicians, but, though they caused him extreme annoyance, did not menace any vital organ. To the subject of his health it will be necessary to return at a later period of his biography. For the present it is enough to remember

that his physical condition was such as to justify his own expectation of death at no distant time.¹

Fond as ever of wandering, Shelley set out in the early summer for a tour with Mary. They visited Devonshire and Clifton, and then settled in a house on Bishopsgate Heath, near Windsor Forest. The summer was further broken by a water excursion up the Thames to its source, in the company of Mr. Peacock and Charles Clairmont. Peacock traces the poet's taste for boating, which afterwards became a passion with him, to this excursion. About this there is, however, some doubt. Medwin tells us that Shelley while a boy delighted in being on the water, and that he enjoyed the pastime at Eton. On the other hand, Mr. W. S. Halliday, a far better authority than Medwin, asserts positively that he never saw Shelley on the river at Eton, and Hogg relates nothing to prove that he practised rowing at Oxford. It is certain that, though inordinately fond of boats and every kind of water—river, sea, lake, or canal—he never learned to swim. Peacock also notices his habit of floating paper boats, and gives an amusing description of the boredom suffered by Hogg on occasions when Shelley would stop by the side of pond or mere to float a mimic navy. The not altogether apocryphal story of his having once constructed a boat out of a bank-post-bill, and launched it on the lake in Kensington Gardens, deserves to be alluded to in this connexion.

On their return from this river journey, Shelley began the poem of *Alastor*, haunting the woodland glades and oak groves of Windsor Forest, and drawing from that noble scenery his inspiration. It was printed with a few other poems in one volume the next year. Not only was

¹ See Letter to Godwin in Shelley Memorials, p. 78.

Alastor the first serious poem published by Shelley ; but it was also the first of his compositions which revealed the greatness of his genius. Rarely has blank verse been written with more majesty and music : and while the influence of Milton and Wordsworth may be traced in certain passages, the versification, tremulous with lyrical vibrations, is such as only Shelley could have produced.

"*Alastor*" is the Greek name for a vengeful dæmon, driving its victim into desert places ; and Shelley, prompted by Peacock, chose it for the title of a poem which describes the Nemesis of solitary souls. Apart from its intrinsic merit as a work of art, *Alastor* has great autobiographical value. Mrs. Shelley affirms that it was written under the expectation of speedy death, and under the sense of disappointment, consequent upon the misfortunes of his early life. This accounts for the somewhat unhealthy vein of sentiment which threads the wilderness of its sublime descriptions. All that Shelley had observed of natural beauty—in Wales, at Lynton, in Switzerland, upon the eddies of the Reuss, beneath the oak shades of the forest—is presented to us in a series of pictures penetrated with profound emotion. But the deeper meaning of *Alastor* is to be found, not in the thought of death nor in the poet's recent communings with nature, but in the motto from St. Augustine placed upon its title-page, and in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, composed about a year later. Enamoured of ideal loveliness, the poet pursues his vision through the universe, vainly hoping to assuage the thirst which has been stimulated in his spirit, and vainly longing for some mortal realization of his love. *Alastor*, like *Epipsychidion*, reveals the mistake which Shelley made in thinking that the idea of beauty could become incarnate for him in any earthly

form : while the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* recognizes the truth that such realization of the ideal is impossible. The very last letter written by Shelley sets the misconception in its proper light : " I think one is always in love with something or other ; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal." But this Shelley discovered only with " the years that bring the philosophic mind," and when he was upon the very verge of his untimely death.

The following quotation is a fair specimen of the blank verse of *Alastor*. It expresses that longing for perfect sympathy in an ideal love, which the sense of divine beauty had stirred in the poet's heart :—

At length upon the lone Chorasman shore
He paused, a wide and melancholy waste
Of putrid marshes. A strong impulse urged
His steps to the sea-shore. A swan was there,
Beside a sluggish stream among the reeds.
It rose as he approached, and, with strong wings
Scaling the upward sky, bent its bright course
High over the immeasurable main.
His eyes pursued its flight :—" Thou hast a home,
Beautiful bird ! thou voyagest to thine home,
Where thy sweet mate will twine her downy neck
With thine, and welcome thy return with eyes
Bright in the lustre of their own fond joy.
And what am I that I should linger here,
With voice far sweeter than thy dying notes,
Spirit more vast than thine, frame more attuned
To beauty, wasting these surpassing powers
In the deaf air, to the blind earth, and heaven
That echoes not my thoughts ?" A gloomy smile
Of desperate hope wrinkled his quivering lips.
For Sleep, he knew, kept most relentlessly
Its precious charge, and silent Death exposed,
Faithless perhaps as Sleep, a shadowy lure,
With doubtful smile mocking its own strange charms.

William, the eldest son of Shelley and Mary Godwin, was born on the 24th of Jan., 1816. In the spring of that year they went together, accompanied by Miss Clairmont, for a second time to Switzerland. They reached Geneva about the 15th of May, and were soon after joined by Lord Byron and his travelling physician, Dr. Polidori. Shelley had not yet made Byron's acquaintance, though he had sent him a copy of *Queen Mab*, with a letter, which miscarried in the post. They were now thrown into daily intercourse, occupying the villas Diodati and Mont Alégre at no great distance from each other, passing their days upon the lake in a boat which they purchased, and spending the nights in conversation. Miss Clairmont had known Byron in London, and their acquaintance now ripened into an intimacy, the fruit of which was the child Allegra. This fact has to be mentioned by Shelley's biographer, because Allegra afterwards became an inmate of his home; and though he and Mary were ignorant of what was passing at Geneva, they did not withdraw their sympathy from the mother of Lord Byron's daughter. The lives of Byron and Shelley during the next six years were destined to be curiously blent. Both were to seek in Italy an exile-home; while their friendship was to become one of the most interesting facts of English literary history. The influence of Byron upon Shelley, as he more than once acknowledged, and as his wife plainly perceived, was, to a large extent, depressing. For Byron's genius and its fruits in poetry he entertained the highest possible opinion. He could not help comparing his own achievement and his fame with Byron's; and the result was that in the presence of one whom he erroneously believed to be the greater poet, he became inactive. Shelley, on the contrary, stimulated

Byron's productive faculty to nobler efforts, raised his moral tone, and infused into his less subtle intellect something of his own philosophical depth and earnestness. Much as he enjoyed Byron's society and admired his writing, Shelley was not blind to the imperfections of his nature. The sketch which he has left us of Count Maddalo, the letters written to his wife from Venice and Ravenna, and his correspondence on the subject of Leigh Hunt's visit to Italy, supply the most discriminating criticism which has yet been passed upon his brother poet's character. It is clear that he never found in Byron a perfect friend, and that he had not accepted him as one with whom he sympathized upon the deeper questions of feeling and conduct. Byron, for his part, recognized in Shelley the purest nature he had ever known. "He was the most gentle, the most amiable, and least worldly-minded person I ever met; full of delicacy, disinterested beyond all other men, and possessing a degree of genius joined to simplicity as rare as it is admirable. He had formed to himself a *beau idéal* of all that is fine, high-minded, and noble, and he acted up to this ideal even to the very letter."

Toward the end of June the two poets made the tour of Lake Geneva in their boat, and were very nearly wrecked off the rocks of Meillerie. On this occasion Shelley was in imminent danger of death from drowning. His one anxiety, however, as he wrote to Peacock, was lest Byron should attempt to save him at the risk of his own life. Byron described him as "bold as a lion;" and indeed it may here be said, once and for all, that Shelley's physical courage was only equalled by his moral fearlessness. He carried both without bravado to the verge of temerity, and may justly be said to have never known

what terror was. Another summer excursion was a visit to Chamouni, of which he has left memorable descriptions in his letters to Peacock, and in the somewhat Coleridgian verses on Mont Blanc. The preface to *Laon and Cythna* shows what a powerful impression had been made upon him by the glaciers, and how he delighted in the element of peril. There is a tone of exultation in the words which record the experiences of his two journeys in Switzerland and France:—"I have been familiar from boyhood with mountains and lakes and the sea, and the solitude of forests. Danger, which sports upon the brink of precipices, has been my playmate. I have trodden the glaciers of the Alps, and lived under the eye of Mont Blanc. I have been a wanderer among distant fields. I have sailed down mighty rivers, and seen the sun rise and set, and the stars come forth, whilst I have sailed night and day down a rapid stream among mountains. I have seen populous cities, and have watched the passions which rise and spread, and sink and change amongst assembled multitudes of men. I have seen the theatre of the more visible ravages of tyranny and war, cities and villages reduced to scattered groups of black and roofless houses, and the naked inhabitants sitting famished upon their desolated thresholds."

On their return to the lake, the Shelleys found M. G. Lewis established with Byron. This addition to the circle introduced much conversation about apparitions, and each member of the party undertook to produce a ghost story. Polidori's *Vampyre* and Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein* were the only durable results of their determination. But an incident occurred which is of some importance in the history of Shelley's psychological condition. Toward midnight on the 18th of July, Byron

recited the lines in *Christabel* about the lady's breast ; when Shelley suddenly started up, shrieked, and fled from the room. He had seen a vision of a woman with eyes instead of nipples. At this time he was writing notes upon the phenomena of sleep to be inserted in his *Speculations on Metaphysics*, and Mrs. Shelley informs us that the mere effort to remember dreams of thrilling or mysterious import so disturbed his nervous system that he had to relinquish the task. At no period of his life was he wholly free from visions which had the reality of facts. Sometimes they occurred in sleep and were prolonged with painful vividness into his waking moments. Sometimes they seemed to grow out of his intense meditation, or to present themselves before his eyes as the projection of a powerful inner impression. All his sensations were abnormally acute, and his ever-active imagination confused the border-lands of the actual and the visionary. Such a nature as Shelley's, through its far greater susceptibility than is common even with artistic temperaments, was debarred in moments of high-strung emotion from observing the ordinary distinctions of subject and object ; and this peculiar quality must never be forgotten when we seek to estimate the proper proportions of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* in certain episodes of his biography. The strange story, for example, told by Peacock about a supposed warning he had received in the spring of this year from Mr. Williams of Tremadoc, may possibly be explained on the hypothesis that his brooding thoughts had taken form before him, both ear and eye having been unconsciously pressed into the service of a subjective energy.¹

On their return to England in September, Shelley took

¹ *Fraser's Magazine*, Jan., 1860, p. 98.

a cottage at Great Marlow on the Thames, in order to be near his friend Peacock. While it was being prepared for the reception of his family, he stayed at Bath, and there heard of Harriet's suicide. The life that once was dearest to him, had ended thus in misery, desertion, want. The mother of his two children, abandoned by both her husband and her lover, and driven from her father's home, had drowned herself after a brief struggle with circumstance. However Shelley may have felt that his conscience was free from blame, however small an element of self-reproach may have mingled with his grief and horror, there is no doubt that he suffered most acutely. His deepest ground for remorse seems to have been the conviction that he had drawn Harriet into a sphere of thought and feeling for which she was not qualified, and that had it not been for him and his opinions, she might have lived a happy woman in some common walk of life. One of his biographers asserts that "he continued to be haunted by certain recollections, partly real and partly imaginative, which pursued him like an Orestes," and even Trelawny, who knew him only in the last months of his life, said that the impression of that dreadful moment was still vivid. We may trace the echo of his feelings in some painfully pathetic verses written in 1817;¹ and though he did not often speak of Harriet, Peacock has recorded one memorable occasion on which he disclosed the anguish of his spirit to a friend.²

Shelley hurried at once to London, and found some consolation in the society of Leigh Hunt. The friendship extended to him by that excellent man at this season of his trouble may perhaps count for something with

¹ Forman, iii. 148.

² Fraser, Jan., 1860, p. 102.

those who are inclined to judge him harshly. Two important events followed immediately upon the tragedy. The first was Shelley's marriage with Mary Godwin on the 30th of December, 1816. [Whether Shelley would have taken this step except under strong pressure from without, appears to me very doubtful. Of all men who ever lived, he was the most resolutely bent on confirming his theories by his practice ; and in this instance there was no valid reason why he should not act up to principles professed in common by himself and the partner of his fortunes, no less than by her father and her mother. It is, therefore, reasonable to suppose that he yielded to arguments ; and these arguments must have been urged by Godwin, who had never treated him with cordiality since he left England in 1816. Godwin, though overrated in his generation and almost ludicrously idealized by Shelley, was a man whose talents verged on genius. But he was by no means consistent. His conduct in money-matters shows that he could not live the life of a self-sufficing philosopher ; while the irritation he expressed when Shelley omitted to address him as Esquire, stood in comic contradiction with his published doctrines. We are therefore perhaps justified in concluding that he worried Shelley, the one enthusiastic and thorough-going follower he had, into marrying his daughter in spite of his disciple's protestations ; nor shall we be far wrong if we surmise that Godwin congratulated himself on Mary's having won the right to bear the name of a future baronet.]

The second event was the refusal of Mr. Westbrook to deliver up the custody of his grandchildren. A chancery suit was instituted ; at the conclusion of which, in March, 1817, Lord Eldon deprived Shelley of his son and daughter on the double ground of his opinions expressed in *Queen Mab*, and of his conduct toward his first

wife. The children were placed in the hands of a Dr. Hume, to be educated in accordance with principles diametrically opposed to their parent's, while Shelley's income was mulcted in a sum of 200*l.* for their maintenance. Thus sternly did the father learn the value of that ancient Æschylean maxim, τῷ δρᾶσαντι παθεῖν, the doer of the deed must suffer. His own impulsiveness, his reckless assumption of the heaviest responsibilities, his overweening confidence in his own strength to move the weight of the world's opinions, had brought him to this tragic pass—to the suicide of the woman who had loved him, and to the sequestration of the offspring whom he loved.

Shelley ought not to be made the text for any sermon ; and yet we may learn from him as from a hero of Hebrew or Hellenic story. His life was a tragedy ; and like some protagonist of Greek drama, he was capable of erring and of suffering greatly. He had kicked against the altar of justice as established in the daily sanctities of human life ; and now he had to bear the penalty. The conventions he despised and treated like the dust beneath his feet, were found in this most cruel crisis to be a rock on which his very heart was broken. From this rude trial of his moral nature he arose a stronger being ; and if longer life had been granted him, he would undoubtedly have presented the ennobling spectacle of one who had been lessoned by his own audacity, and by its bitter fruits, into harmony with the immutable laws which he was ever seeking to obey. It is just this conflict between the innate rectitude of Shelley's over-daring nature and the circumstances of ordinary existence, which makes his history so tragic : and we may justly wonder whether, when he read the Sophoclean tragedies of Œdipus, he did not apply their doctrine of self-will and Nemesis to his own fortunes.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE AT MARLOW, AND JOURNEY TO ITALY.

AMID the torturing distractions of the Chancery suit about his children, and the still more poignant anguish of his own heart, and with the cloud of what he thought swift-coming death above his head, Shelley worked steadily, during the summer of 1817, upon his poem of *Laon and Cythna*. Six months were spent in this task. "The poem," to borrow Mrs. Shelley's words, "was written in his boat, as it floated under the beech-groves of Bisham, or during wanderings in the neighbouring country, which is distinguished for peculiar beauty." Whenever Shelley could, he composed in the open air. The terraces of the Villa Cappuccini at Este, and the Baths of Caracalla were the birthplace of *Prometheus*. *The Cenci* was written on the roof of the Villa Valsovano at Leghorn. The Cascine of Florence, the pine-woods near Pisa, the lawns above San Giuliano, and the summits of the Euganean Hills, witnessed the creation of his loveliest lyrics; and his last great poem, the *Triumph of Life*, was transferred to paper in his boat upon the Bay of Spezia.

If *Alastor* had expressed one side of Shelley's nature, his devotion to Ideal Beauty, *Laon and Cythna* was in a far profounder sense representative of its author. All his previous experiences and all his aspirations—his pas-

sionate belief in friendship, his principle of the equality of women with men, his demand for bloodless revolution, his confidence in eloquence and reason to move nations, his doctrine of free love, his vegetarianism, his hatred of religious intolerance and tyranny—are blent together and concentrated in the glowing cantos of this wonderful romance. The hero, Laon, is himself idealized, the self which he imagined when he undertook his Irish campaign. The heroine, Cythna, is the helpmate he had always dreamed, the woman exquisitely feminine, yet capable of being fired with male enthusiasms, and of grappling the real problems of our nature with a man's firm grasp. In the first edition of the poem he made Laon and Cythna brother and sister, not because he believed in the desirability of incest, but because he wished to throw a glove down to society, and to attack the intolerance of custom in its stronghold. In the preface, he tells us that it was his purpose to kindle in the bosoms of his readers "a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice, can ever wholly extinguish among mankind;" to illustrate "the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence, and devoted to the love of mankind;" and to celebrate Love "as the sole law which should govern the moral world." The wild romantic treatment of this didactic motive makes the poem highly characteristic of its author. It is written in Spenserian stanzas, with a rapidity of movement and a dazzling brilliance that are Shelley's own. The story relates the kindling of a nation to freedom at the cry of a young poet-prophet, the temporary triumph of the good cause, the final victory of despotic force, and the martyrdom

of the hero, together with whom the heroine falls a willing victim. It is full of thrilling incidents and lovely pictures; yet the tale is the least part of the poem; and few readers have probably been able either to sympathize with its visionary characters, or to follow the narrative without weariness. As in the case of other poems by Shelley—especially those in which he attempted to tell a story, for which kind of art his genius was not well suited—the central motive of *Laon and Cythna* is surrounded by so radiant a photosphere of imagery and eloquence that it is difficult to fix our gaze upon it, blinded as we are by the excess of splendour. Yet no one now can read the terrible tenth canto, or the lovely fifth, without feeling that a young eagle of poetry had here tried the full strength of his pinions in their flight. This truth was by no means recognized when *Laon and Cythna* first appeared before the public. Hooted down, derided, stigmatized, and howled at, it only served to intensify the prejudice with which the author of *Queen Mab* had come to be regarded.

I have spoken of this poem under its first name of *Laon and Cythna*. A certain number of copies were issued with this title;¹ but the publisher, Ollier, not without reason dreaded the effect the book would make; he therefore induced Shelley to alter the relationship between the hero and his bride, and issued the old sheets with certain cancelled pages under the title of *Revolt of Islam*. It was published in January, 1818. While still resident at Marlow, Shelley began two autobiographical poems—the one *Prince*

¹ How many copies were put in circulation is not known. There must certainly have been many more than the traditional three; for when I was a boy at Harrow, I picked up two uncut copies in boards at a Bristol bookshop, for the price of 2s. 6d. a piece.

Athanase, which he abandoned as too introspective and morbidly self-analytical, the other *Rosalind and Helen*, which he finished afterwards in Italy. Of the second of these compositions he entertained a poor opinion; nor will it bear comparison with his best work. To his biographer its chief interest consists in the character of Lionel, drawn less perhaps exactly from himself than as an ideal of the man he would have wished to be. The poet in *Alastor*, Laon in the *Revolt of Islam*, Lionel in *Rosalind and Helen*, and Prince Athanase, are in fact a remarkable row of self-portraits, varying in the tone and scale of idealistic treatment bestowed upon them. Later on in life, Shelley outgrew this preoccupation with his idealized self, and directed his genius to more objective themes. Yet the autobiographic tendency, as befitted a poet of the highest lyric type, remained to the end a powerful characteristic.

Before quitting the first period of Shelley's development, it may be well to set before the reader a specimen of that self-delineative poetry which characterized it; and since it is difficult to detach a single passage from the continuous stanzas of *Laon and Cythna*, I have chosen the lines in *Rosalind and Helen* which describe young Lionel:

To Lionel,
Though of great wealth and lineage high,
Yet through those dungeon walls there came
Thy thrilling light, O Liberty!
And as the meteor's midnight flame
Startles the dreamer, sun-like truth
Flashed on his visionary youth,
And filled him, not with love, but faith,
And hope, and courage mute in death;
For love and life in him were twins,
Born at one birth: in every other
First life, then love its course begins,

Though they be children of one mother ;
And so through this dark world they fleet
Divided, till in death they meet :
But he loved all things ever. Then
He past amid the strife of men,
And stood at the throne of armed power
Pleading for a world of woe :
Secure as one on a rock-built tower
O'er the wrecks which the surge trails to and fro,
'Mid the passions wild of human kind
He stood, like a spirit calming them ;
For, it was said, his words could find
Like music the lulled crowd, and stem
That torrent of unquiet dream,
Which mortals truth and reason deem,
But ~~is~~ revenge and fear and pride.
Joyous he was ; and hope and peace
On all who heard him did abide,
Raining like dew from his sweet talk,
As where the evening star may walk
Along the brink of the gloomy seas,
Liquid mists of splendour quiver.
His very gestures touch'd to tears
The unpersuaded tyrant, never
So moved before : his presence stung
The torturers with their victim's pain,
And none knew how ; and through their ears,
The subtle witchcraft of his tongue
Unlocked the hearts of those who keep
Gold, the world's bond of slavery.
Men wondered, and some sneer'd to see
One sow what he could never reap :
For he is rich, they said, and young,
And might drink from the depths of luxury.
If he seeks Fame, Fame never crown'd
The champion of a trampled creed :
If he seeks Power, Power is enthroned
'Mid ancient rights and wrongs, to feed
Which hungry wolves with praise and spoil,
Those who would sit near Power must toil ;
And such, there sitting, all may see.

During the year he spent at Marlow, Shelley was a frequent visitor at Leigh Hunt's Hampstead house, where he made acquaintance with Keats, and the brothers Smith, authors of *Rejected Addresses*. Hunt's recollections supply some interesting details, which, since Hogg and Peacock fail us at this period, may be profitably used. Describing the manner of his life at Marlow, Hunt writes as follows: "He rose early in the morning, walked and read before breakfast, took that meal sparingly, wrote and studied the greater part of the morning, walked and read again, dined on vegetables (for he took neither meat nor wine), conversed with his friends (to whom his house was ever open), again walked out, and usually finished with reading to his wife till ten o'clock, when he went to bed. This was his daily existence. His book was generally Plato, or Homer, or one of the Greek tragedians, or the Bible, in which last he took a great, though peculiar, and often admiring interest. One of his favourite parts was the book of Job." Mrs. Shelley in her note on the *Revolt of Islam*, confirms this account of his Bible studies; and indeed the influence of the Old Testament upon his style may be traced in several of his poems. In the same paragraph from which I have just quoted, Leigh Hunt gives a just notion of his relation to Christianity, pointing out that he drew a distinction between the Pauline presentation of the Christian creeds, and the spirit of the Gospels. "His want of faith in the letter, and his exceeding faith in the spirit of Christianity, formed a comment, the one on the other, very formidable to those who chose to forget what Scripture itself observes on that point." We have only to read Shelley's *Essay on Christianity*, in order to perceive what reverent admiration he felt for Jesus, and how profoundly he understood the true character of his teaching.

That work, brief as it is, forms one of the most valuable extant contributions to a sound theology, and is morally far in advance of the opinions expressed by many who regard themselves as specially qualified to speak on the subject. It is certain that, as Christianity passes beyond its mediæval phase, and casts aside the husk of out-worn dogmas, it will more and more approximate to Shelley's exposition. Here and here only is a vital faith, adapted to the conditions of modern thought, indestructible because essential, and fitted to unite instead of separating minds of divers quality. It may sound paradoxical to claim for Shelley of all men a clear insight into the enduring element of the Christian creed; but it was precisely his detachment from all its accidents which enabled him to discern its spiritual purity, and placed him in a true relation to its Founder. For those who would neither on the one hand relinquish what is permanent in religion, nor yet on the other deny the inevitable conclusions of modern thought, his teaching is indubitably valuable. His fierce tirades against historic Christianity must be taken as directed against an ecclesiastical system of spiritual tyranny, hypocrisy, and superstition, which in his opinion had retarded the growth of free institutions, and fettered the human intellect. Like Campanella, he distinguished between Christ, who sealed the gospel of charity with his blood, and those Christians, who would be the first to crucify their Lord if he returned to earth.

That Shelley lived up to his religious creed is amply proved. To help the needy and to relieve the sick, seemed to him a simple duty, which he cheerfully discharged. "His charity, though liberal, was not weak. He inquired personally into the circumstances of his

petitioners, visited the sick in their beds, . . . and kept a regular list of industrious poor, whom he assisted with small sums to make up their accounts." At Marlow, the miserable condition of the lace-makers called forth all his energies ; and Mrs. Shelley tells us that an acute ophthalmia, from which he twice suffered, was contracted in a visit to their cottages. A story told by Leigh Hunt about his finding a woman ill on Hampstead Heath, and carrying her from door to door in the vain hopes of meeting with a man as charitable as himself, until he had to house the poor creature with his friends the Hunts, reads like a practical illustration of Christ's parable about the Good Samaritan. Nor was it merely to the so-called poor that Shelley showed his generosity. His purse was always open to his friends. Peacock received from him an annual allowance of 100*l*. He gave Leigh Hunt, on one occasion, 1000*l*. ; and he discharged debts of Godwin, amounting, it is said, to about 6000*l*. In his pamphlet on *Putting Reform to the Vote*, he offered to subscribe 100*l*. for the purpose of founding an association ; and we have already seen that he headed the Tremadoc subscription with a sum of 100*l*. These instances of his generosity might be easily multiplied ; and when we remember that his present income was 1000*l*., out of which 200*l*. went to the support of his children, it will be understood not only that he could not live luxuriously, but also that he was in frequent money difficulties through the necessity of raising funds upon his expectations. His self-denial in all minor matters of expenditure was conspicuous. Without a murmur, without ostentation, this heir of the richest baronet in Sussex illustrated by his own conduct those principles of democratic simplicity and of fraternal charity which formed his political and social creed.

A glimpse into the cottage at Great Marlow is afforded by a careless sentence of Leigh Hunt's. "He used to sit in a study adorned with casts, as large as life, of the Vatican Apollo and the celestial Venus." Fancy Shelley with his bright eyes and elf-locks in a large, low-roofed room, correcting proofs of *Laon and Cythna*, between the Apollo of the Belvedere and the Venus de' Medici, life-sized, and as crude as casts by Shout could make them! In this house, Miss Clairmont, with her brother and Allegra, lived as Shelley's guests; and here Clara Shelley was born on the 3rd of September, 1817. In the same autumn, Shelley suffered from a severe pulmonary attack. The critical state of his health and the apprehension, vouched for by Mrs. Shelley, that the Chancellor might lay his vulture's talons on the children of his second marriage, were the motives which induced him to leave England for Italy in the spring of 1818.¹ He never returned. Four years only of life were left to him—years filled with music that will sound as long as English lasts.

It was on the 11th of March that the Shelleys took their departure with Miss Clairmont and the child Allegra. They went straight to Milan, and after visiting the Lake of Como, Pisa, the Bagni di Lucca, Venice, and Rome, they settled early in the following December at Naples. Shelley's letters to Peacock form the invaluable record of this period of his existence. Taken altogether, they are the most perfect specimens of descriptive prose in the English language; never over-charged with colour, vibrating with emotions excited by the stimulating scenes of Italy, frank in criticism, and exquisitely delicate in observation. Their transparent sincerity and unpre-

¹ See Note on Poems of 1819, and compare the lyric "The billows on the beach."

meditated grace, combined with natural finish of expression, make them masterpieces of a style at once familiar and elevated. That Shelley's sensibility to art was not so highly cultivated as his feeling for nature, is clear enough in many passages: but there is no trace of admiring to order in his comments upon pictures or statues. Familiarity with the great works of antique and Italian art would doubtless have altered some of the opinions he at first expressed; just as longer residence among the people made him modify his views about their character. Meanwhile, the spirit of modest and unprejudiced attention in which he began his studies of sculpture and painting, might well be imitated in the present day by travellers who think that to pin their faith to some famous critic's verdict is the acme of good taste. If there were space for a long quotation from these letters, I should choose the description of Pompeii (Jan. 26, 1819), or that of the Baths of Caracalla (March 23, 1819). As it is, I must content myself with a short but eminently characteristic passage, written from Ferrara, Nov. 7, 1818:—

The handwriting of Ariosto is a small, firm, and pointed character, expressing, as I should say, a strong and keen, but circumscribed energy of mind; that of Tasso is large, free, and flowing, except that there is a checked expression in the midst of its flow, which brings the letters into a smaller compass than one expected from the beginning of the word. It is the symbol of an intense and earnest mind, exceeding at times its own depth, and admonished to return by the chillness of the waters of oblivion striking upon its adventurous feet. You know I always seek in what I see the manifestation of something beyond the present and tangible object; and as we do not agree in physiognomy, so we may not agree now. But my business is to relate my own sensations, and not to attempt to inspire others with them.

In the middle of August, Shelley left his wife at the Bagui di Lucca, and paid a visit to Lord Byron at Venica. He arrived at midnight in a thunderstorm. *Julian and Maddalo* was the literary fruit of this excursion—a poem which has rightly been characterized by Mr. Rossetti as the most perfect specimen in our language of the “poetical treatment of ordinary things.” The description of a Venetian sunset, touched to sadness amid all its splendour by the gloomy presence of the madhouse, ranks among Shelley’s finest word-paintings; while the glimpse of Byron’s life is interesting on a lower level. Here is the picture of the sunset and the island of San Lazzaro :—

Oh !

How beautiful is sunset, when the glow
Of heaven descends upon a land like thee,
Thou paradise of exiles, Italy,
Thy mountains, seas, and vineyards, and the towers,
Of cities they encircle !—It was ours
To stand on thee, beholding it : and then,
Just where we had dismounted, the Count’s men
Were waiting for us with the gondola.
As those who pause on some delightful way,
Though bent on pleasant pilgrimage, we stood
Looking upon the evening, and the flood
Which lay between the city and the shore,
Paved with the image of the sky. The hoar
And airy Alps, towards the north, appeared,
Thro’ mist, a heaven-sustaining bulwark, reared
Between the east and west ; and half the sky
Was roofed with clouds of rich emblazonry,
Dark purple at the zenith, which still grew
Down the steep west into a wondrous hue
Brighter than burning gold, even to the rent
Where the swift sun yet paused in his descent
Among the many-folded hills. They were
Those famous Euganean hills, which bear,
As seen from Lido through the harbour piles,

The likeness of a clump of peaked isles—
 And then, as if the earth and sea had been
 Dissolved into one lake of fire, were seen
 Those mountains towering, as from waves of flame,
 Around the vaporous sun, from which there came
 The inmost purple spirit of light, and made
 Their very peaks transparent. "Ere it fade,"
 Said my companion, "I will show you soon
 A better station." So, o'er the lagoon
 We glided; and from that funereal bark
 I leaned, and saw the city, and could mark
 How from their many isles, in evening's gleam,
 Its temples and its palaces did seem
 Like fabrics of enchantment piled to heaven.
 I was about to speak, when—"We are even
 Now at the point I meant," said Maddalo,
 And bade the gondolieri cease to row.
 "Look, Julian, on the west, and listen well
 If you hear not a deep and heavy bell."
 I looked, and saw between us and the sun
 A building on an island, such a one
 As age to age might add, for uses vile,—
 A windowless, deformed, and dreary pile;
 And on the top an open tower, where hung
 A bell, which in the radiance swayed and swung,—
 We could just hear its coarse and iron tongue:
 The broad sun sank behind it, and it tolled
 In strong and black relief—"What we behold
 Shall be the madhouse and its belfry tower,"—
 Said Maddalo; "and ever at this hour,
 Those who may cross the water hear that bell,
 Which calls the maniacs, each one from his cell,
 To vespers."

It may be parenthetically observed that one of the few familiar quotations from Shelley's poems occurs in *Julian and Maddalo*:—

Most wretched men
 Are cradled into poetry by wrong:
 They learn in suffering what they teach in song.

Byron lent the Shelleys his villa of the Cappuccini near Este, where they spent some weeks in the autumn. Here *Prometheus Unbound* was begun, and the *Lines written among Euganean Hills* were composed ; and here Clara became so ill that her parents thought it necessary to rush for medical assistance to Venice. They had forgotten their passport ; but Shelley's irresistible energy overcame all difficulties, and they entered Venice—only in time, however, for the child to die.

Nearly the whole of the winter was spent at Naples, where Shelley suffered from depression of more than ordinary depth. Mrs. Shelley attributed this gloom to the state of his health ; but Medwin tells a strange story, which, if it is not wholly a romance, may better account for the poet's melancholy. He says that so far back as the year 1816, on the night before his departure from London, "a married lady, young, handsome, and of noble connexions," came to him, avowed the passionate love she had conceived for him, and proposed that they should fly together.¹ He explained to her that his hand and heart had both been given irrevocably to another, and, after the expression of the most exalted sentiments on both sides, they parted. She followed him, however, from place to place ; and without intruding herself upon his notice, found some consolation in remaining near him. Now she arrived at Naples ; and at Naples she died. The web of Shelley's life was a wide one, and included more destinies than his own. [Godwin, as we have reason to believe, attributed the suicide of Fanny Imlay to her hopeless love for Shelley ; and the tale of Harriet has been already told.] Therefore there is nothing absolutely

¹ Medwin's *Life of Shelley*, vol. i. 324. His date, 1814, appears from the context to be a misprint.

improbable in Medwin's story, especially when we remember what Hogg half-humorously tells us about Shelley's attraction for women in London. At any rate, the excessive wretchedness of the lyrics written at Naples can hardly be accounted for by the "constant and poignant physical sufferings" of which Mrs. Shelley speaks, since these were habitual to him. She was herself, moreover, under the impression that he was concealing something from her, and we know from her own words in another place that his "fear to wound the feelings of others" often impelled him to keep his deepest sorrows to himself.¹

All this while his health was steadily improving. The menace of consumption was removed; and though he suffered from severe attacks of pain in the side, the cause of this persistent malady does not seem to have been ascertained. At Naples he was under treatment for disease of the liver. Afterwards, his symptoms were ascribed to nephritis; and it is certain that his greater or less freedom from uneasiness varied with the quality of the water he drank. He was, for instance, forced to eschew the drinking water of Ravenna, because it aggravated his symptoms; while Florence, for a similar reason, proved an unsuitable residence. The final settlement of the Shelleys at Pisa seems to have been determined by the fact that the water of that place agreed with him. That the spasms which from time to time attacked him were extremely serious, is abundantly proved by the testimony of those who lived with him at this period, and by his own letters. Some relief was obtained by mesmerism, a remedy suggested by Medwin; but the obstinacy of the torment preyed upon his spirits to such an extent, that even during

¹ Note on the Revolt of Islam.



the last months of his life we find him begging Trelawny to procure him prussic acid as a final and effectual remedy for all the ills that flesh is heir to. It may be added that mental application increased the mischief, for he told Leigh Hunt that the composition of *The Cenci* had cost him a fresh seizure. Yet though his sufferings were indubitably real, the eminent physician, Vaccà, could discover no organic disease; and possibly Trelawny came near the truth when he attributed Shelley's spasms to insufficient and irregular diet, and to a continual over-taxing of his nervous system.

Mrs. Shelley states that the change from England to Italy was in all respects beneficial to her husband. She was inclined to refer the depression from which he occasionally suffered, to his solitary habits; and there are several passages in his own letters which connect his melancholy with solitude. It is obvious that when he found himself in the congenial company of Trelawny, Williams, Medwin, or the Gisbornes, he was simply happy; and nothing could be further from the truth than to paint him as habitually sunk in gloom. On the contrary, we hear quite as much about his high spirits, his "Homeric laughter," his playfulness with children, his readiness to join in the amusements of his chosen circle, and his incomparable conversation, as we do about his solitary broodings, and the seasons when pain or bitter memories over-cast his heaven. Byron, who had some right to express a judgment in such a matter, described him as the most companionable man under the age of thirty he had ever met with. Shelley rode and practised pistol-shooting with his brother bard, sat up late to talk with him, enjoyed his jokes, and even betted with him on one occasion marked by questionable taste. All this is quite

incompatible with that martyrdom to persecution, remorse, or physical suffering, with which it has pleased some romantic persons to invest the poet. Society of the ordinary kind he hated. The voice of a stranger, or a ring at the house-bell, heard from afar with Shelley's almost inconceivable quickness of perception, was enough to make him leave the house; and one of his prettiest poems is written on his mistaking his wife's mention of the Aziola, a little owl common enough in Tuscany, for an allusion to a tiresome visitor. This dislike for intercourse with commonplace people was the source of some disagreement between him and Mrs. Shelley, and kept him further apart from Byron than he might otherwise have been. In a valuable letter recently published by Mr. Garnett, he writes:—"I detest all society—almost all, at least—and Lord Byron is the nucleus of all that is hateful and tiresome in it." And again, speaking about his wife to Trelawny, he said:—"She can't bear solitude, nor I society—the quick coupled with the dead."

In the year 1818-19 the Shelleys had no friends at all in Italy, except Lord Byron at Venice, and Mr. and Mrs. John Gisborne at Leghorn. Mrs. Gisborne had been a friend of Mary Wollstonecraft and Godwin. She was a woman of much cultivation, devoid of prejudice, and, though less enthusiastic than Shelley liked, quite capable of appreciating the inestimable privilege of his acquaintance. Her husband, to use a now almost obsolete phrase, was a scholar and a gentleman. He shared his wife's enlightened opinions, and remained stanch through good and ill report to his new friends. At Rome and Naples they knew almost no one. Shelley's time was therefore passed in study and composition. In the previous summer he had translated the *Symposium* of Plato, and begun an essay on the Ethics



of the Greeks, which remains unluckily a fragment. Together with Mary he read much Italian literature, and his observations on the chief Italian poets form a valuable contribution to their criticism. While he admired the splendour and invention of Ariosto, he could not tolerate his moral tone. Tasso struck him as cold and artificial, in spite of his "delicate moral sensibility." Boccaccio he preferred to both; and his remarks on this prose-poet are extremely characteristic. "How much do I admire Boccaccio! What descriptions of nature are those in his little introductions to every new day! It is the morning of life stripped of that mist of familiarity which makes it obscure to us. Boccaccio seems to me to have possessed a deep sense of the fair ideal of human life, considered in its social relations. His more serious theories of love agree especially with mine. He often expresses things lightly too, which have serious meanings of a very beautiful kind. He is a moral casuist, the opposite of the Christian, stoical, ready-made, and worldly system of morals. Do you remember one little remark, or rather maxim of his, which might do some good to the common, narrow-minded conceptions of love,—'Bocca baciata non perde ventura; anzi rinnuova, come fa la luna'?" Dante and Petrarch remained the objects of his lasting admiration, though the cruel Christianity of the *Inferno* seemed to him an ineradicable blot upon the greatest of Italian poems. Of Petrarch's "tender and solemn enthusiasm," he speaks with the sympathy of one who understood the inner mysteries of idealizing love.

It will be gathered from the foregoing quotations that Shelley, notwithstanding his profound study of style and his exquisite perception of beauty in form and rhythm, required more than merely artistic ex-

callences in poetry. He judged poems by their content and spirit; and while he plainly expressed his abhorrence of the didactic manner, he held that art must be moralized in order to be truly great. The distinction he drew between Theocritus and the earlier Greek singers in the *Defence of Poetry*, his severe strictures on *The Two Noble Kinsmen* in a letter to Mary (Aug. 20, 1818), and his phrase about Ariosto, "who is entertaining and graceful, and *sometimes* a poet," illustrate the application of critical canons wholly at variance with the "art for art" doctrine.

While studying Italian, he continued faithful to Greek. Plato was often in his hands, and the dramatists formed his almost inseparable companions. How deeply he felt the art of the Homeric poems, may be gathered from the following extract:—"I congratulate you on your conquest of the *Iliad*. You must have been astonished at the perpetually increasing magnificence of the last seven books. Homer there truly begins to be himself. The battle of the Scamander, the funeral of Patroclus, and the high and solemn close of the whole bloody tale in tenderness and inexpressible sorrow, are wrought in a manner incomparable with anything of the same kind. The *Odyssey* is sweet, but there is nothing like this." About this time, prompted by Mrs. Gisborne, he began the study of Spanish, and conceived an ardent admiration for Calderon, whose splendid and supernatural fancy tallied with his own. "I am bathing myself in the light and odour of the starry Autos," he writes to Mr. Gisborne in the autumn of 1820. *Faust*, too, was a favourite. "I have been reading over and over again *Faust*, and always with sensations which no other composition excites. It deepens the gloom and augments

the rapidity of ideas, and would therefore seem to me an unfit study for any person who is a prey to the reproaches of memory, and the delusions of an imagination not to be restrained." The profound impression made upon him by Margaret's story is expressed in two letters about Retzsch's illustrations:—"The artist makes one envy his happiness that he can sketch such things with calmness, which I only dared look upon once, and which made my brain swim round only to touch the leaf on the opposite side of which I knew that it was figured."

The fruits of this occupation with Greek, Italian, Spanish, and German were Shelley's translations from Homer and Euripides, from Dante, from Calderon's *Magico Prodigioso*, and from *Faust*, translations which have never been surpassed for beauty of form and complete transfusion of the spirit of one literature into the language of another. On translation, however, he set but little store, asserting that he only undertook it when he "could do absolutely nothing else," and writing earnestly to dissuade Leigh Hunt from devoting time which might be better spent, to work of subordinate importance.¹ The following version of a Greek epigram on Plato's spirit will illustrate his own method of translation:—

Eagle! why soarest thou above that tomb?
To what sublime and star-y-paven home
Floatest thou?
I am the image of swift Plato's spirit,
Ascending heaven:—Athens does inherit
His corpse below.

Some time in the year 1820-21, he composed the *Defence of Poetry*, stimulated to this undertaking by his friend Peacock's article on poetry, published in the

¹ Letter from Florence, Nov., 1819.

*Literary Miscellany.*¹ This essay not only sets forth his theory of his own art, but it also contains some of his finest prose writing, of which the following passage, valuable alike for matter and style, may be cited as a specimen:—

The functions of the poetical faculty are two-fold; by one it creates new materials of knowledge, and power, and pleasure; by the other it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange them according to a certain rhythm and order which may be called the beautiful and the good. The cultivation of poetry is never more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceed the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature. The body has then become too unwieldy for that which animates it.

Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought; it is that from which all spring, and that which adorns all; and that which, if blighted, denies the fruit and the seed, and withholds from the barren world the nourishment and the succession of the scions of the tree of life. It is the perfect and consummate surface and bloom of all things; it is as the odour and the colour of the rose to the texture of the elements which compose it, as the form and splendour of unfaded beauty to the secrets of anatomy and corruption. What were virtue, love, patriotism, friendship—what were the scenery of this beautiful universe which we inhabit; what were our consolations on this side of the grave—and what were our aspirations beyond it, if poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar? Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the

¹ See Letter to Ollier, Jan. 20, 1820, Shelley Memorials, p. 135.

mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet. I appeal to the greatest poets of the present day, whether it is not an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study. The toil and the delay recommended by critics, can be justly interpreted to mean no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments, and an artificial connexion of the spaces between their suggestions by the intertexture of conventional expressions; a necessity only imposed by the limitedness of the poetical faculty itself; for Milton conceived the "Paradise Lost" as a whole before he executed it in portions. We have his own authority also for the muse having "dictated" to him the "unpremeditated song." And let this be an answer to those who would allege the fifty-six various readings of the first line of the "Orlando Furioso." Compositions so produced are to poetry what mosaic is to painting. This instinct and intuition of the poetical faculty is still more observable in the plastic and pictorial arts; a great statue or picture grows under the power of the artist as a child in the mother's womb; and the very mind which directs the hands in formation is incapable of accounting to itself for the origin, the gradations, or the media of the process.

Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden, but elevating and delightful beyond all expression: so that even in the desire and the regret they leave, there cannot but be pleasure, participating as it does in the nature of its object. It is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and

whose traces remain only, as on the wrinkled sand which paves it. These and corresponding conditions of being are experienced principally by those of the most delicate sensibility and the most enlarged imagination; and the state of mind produced by them is at war with every base desire. The enthusiasm of virtue, love, patriotism, and friendship, is essentially linked with such emotions; and whilst they last, self appears as what it is, an atom to a universe. Poets are not only subject to these experiences as spirits of the most refined organisation, but they can colour all that they combine with the evanescent hues of this ethereal world; a word, a trait in the representation of a scene or a passion, will touch the enchanted chord, and reanimate, in those who have ever experienced these emotions, the sleeping, the cold, the buried image of the past. Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world; it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life, and veiling them, or in language or in form, sends them forth among mankind, bearing sweet news of kindred joy to those with whom their sisters abide—abide, because there is no portal of expression from the caverns of the spirit which they inhabit into the universe of things. Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.

In the midst of these æsthetic studies, and while producing his own greatest works, Shelley was not satisfied that his genius ought to be devoted to poetry. "I consider poetry," he wrote to Peacock, January 26th, 1819, "very subordinate to moral and political science, and if I were well, certainly I would aspire to the latter; for I can conceive a great work, embodying the discoveries of all ages, and harmonizing the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled. Far from me is such an attempt, and I shall be content, by exercising my fancy, to amuse myself, and perhaps some others, and cast what weight I can into the scale of that balance which the Giant of Arthegall holds." Whether he was right in the conviction that his genius was no less fitted for metaphysical speculation or for political

science than for poetry, is a question that admits of much debate.¹ We have nothing but fragments whereby to form a definite opinion—the unfinished *Defence of Poetry*, the unfinished *Essay on a Future State*, the unfinished *Essay on Christianity*, the unfinished *Essay on the Punishment of Death*, and the scattered *Speculations on Metaphysics*. None of these compositions justify the belief so confidently expressed by Mrs. Shelley in her Preface to the prose works, that “had not Shelley deserted metaphysics for poetry in his youth, and had he not been lost to us early, so that all his vaster projects were wrecked with him in the waves, he would have presented the world with a complete theory of mind ; a theory to which Berkeley, Coleridge, and Kant would have contributed ; but more simple, unimpugnable, and entire than the systems of these writers.” Their incompleteness rather tends to confirm what she proceeds to state, that the strain of philosophical composition was too great for his susceptible nerves ; while her further observation that “thought kindled imagination and awoke sensation, and rendered him dizzy from too great keenness of emotion,” seems to indicate that his nature was primarily that of a poet deeply tinctured with philosophical speculation, rather than that of a metaphysician warmed at intervals to an imaginative fervour. Another of her remarks confirms us in this opinion. “He considered these philosophical views of mind and nature to be instinct with the intensest spirit of poetry.”² This is the position of the poet rather than the analyst ; and, on the whole, we are probably justified in concluding with Mrs.

¹ See Mrs. Shelley's note on the Revolt of Islam, and the whole Preface to the Prose Works.

² Note on Prometheus.

Shelley, that he followed a true instinct when he dedicated himself to poetry and trained his powers in that direction.¹ To dogmatize upon the topic would be worse than foolish. There was something incalculable, incommensurable, and dæmonic in Shelley's genius; and what he might have achieved, had his life been spared and had his health progressively improved, it is of course impossible to say.

In the spring of 1819 the Shelleys settled in Rome, where the poet proceeded with the composition of *Prometheus Unbound*. He used to write among the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, not then, as now, despoiled of all their natural beauty, but waving with the Paradise of flowers and shrubs described in his incomparable letter of March the 23rd to Peacock. Rome, however, was not destined to retain them long. On the 7th of June they lost their son William after a short illness. Shelley loved this child intensely, and sat by his bedside for sixty hours without taking rest. He was now practically childless; and his grief found expression in many of his poems, especially in the fragment headed "*Roma, Roma, Roma / non è più com' era prima.*" William was buried in the Protestant cemetery, of which Shelley had written a description to Peacock in the previous December. "The English burying-place is a green slope near the walls, under the pyramidal tomb of Cestius, and is, I think, the most beautiful and solemn cemetery I ever beheld. To see the sun shining on its bright grass, fresh, when we first visited it, with the autumnal dews, and hear the whispering of the wind among the leaves of the trees which have overgrown the tomb of Cestius, and the soil which is stirring in the sun-warm earth, and to mark the tombs,

¹ Note on Revolt of Islam.

mostly of women and young people who were buried there, one might, if one were to die, desire the sleep they seem to sleep. Such is the human mind, and so it peoples with its wishes vacancy and oblivion."

Escaping from the scene of so much sorrow, they established themselves at the Villa Valsovano, near Leghorn. Here Shelley began and finished *The Cenci* at the instance of his wife, who rightly thought that he undervalued his own powers as a dramatic poet. The supposed portrait of Beatrice in the Barberini Palace had powerfully affected his imagination, and he fancied that her story would form the fitting subject for a tragedy. It is fortunate for English literature that the real facts of that domestic drama, as recently published by Signor Bertolotti, were then involved in a tissue of romance and legend. During this summer he saw a great deal of the Gisborne family. Mrs. Gisborne's son by a previous marriage, Henry Reveley, was an engineer, and Shelley conceived a project of helping him to build a steamer which should ply between Leghorn and Marseilles. He was to supply the funds, and the pecuniary profit was to be shared by the Gisborne family. The scheme eventually fell through, though Shelley spent a good deal of money upon it; and its only importance is the additional light it throws upon his public and private benevolence. From Leghorn the Shelleys removed in the autumn to Florence, where, on the 12th of November, the present Sir Percy Florence Shelley was born. Here Shelley wrote the last act of *Prometheus Unbound*, which, though the finest portion of that unique drama, seems to have been an afterthought. In the Cascine outside Florence he also composed the *Ode to the West Wind*, the most symmetrically perfect as well as the most im-

passioned of his minor lyrics. He spent much time in the galleries, made notes upon the principal antique statues, and formed a plan of systematic art-study. The climate, however, disagreed with him, and in the month of January, 1820, they took up their abode at Pisa.

1819 was the most important year in Shelley's life, so far as literary production is concerned. Besides *The Cenci* and *Prometheus Unbound*, of which it yet remains to speak, this year saw the production of several political and satirical poems—the *Masque of Anarchy*, suggested by the news of the Peterloo massacre, being by far the most important. Shelley attempted the composition of short popular songs which should stir the English people to a sense of what he felt to be their degradation. But he lacked the directness which alone could make such verses forcible, and the passionate apostrophe to the Men of England in his *Masque of Anarchy* marks the highest point of his achievement in this style :—

Men of England, Heirs of Glory,
Heroes of unwritten story,
Nurslings of one mighty mother,
Hopes of her, and one another !

Rise, like lions after slumber,
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like dew,
Which in sleep had fall'n on you.
Ye are many, they are few.

Peter Bell the Third, written in this year, and *Swell-foot the Tyrant*, composed in the following autumn, are remarkable as showing with what keen interest Shelley watched public affairs in England from his exile home ; but for my own part, I cannot agree with

those critics who esteem their humour at a high rate. The political poems may profitably be compared with his contemporary correspondence; with the letters, for instance, to Leigh Hunt, November 23rd, 1819; and to Mr. John Gisborne, April 10th, 1822; and with an undated fragment published by Mr. Garnett in the *Relics of Shelley*, page 84. No student of English political history before the Reform Bill can regard his apprehensions of a great catastrophe as ill-founded. His insight into the real danger to the nation was as penetrating as his suggestion of a remedy was moderate. Those who are accustomed to think of the poet as a visionary enthusiast, will rub their eyes when they read the sober lines in which he warns his friend to be cautious about the security offered by the English Funds. Another letter, dated Lerici, June 29, 1822, illustrates the same practical temper of mind, the same logical application of political principles to questions of public economy.

That *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci* should have been composed in one and the same year must be reckoned among the greatest wonders of literature, not only because of their sublime greatness, but also because of their essential difference. *Æschylus*, it is well-known, had written a sequel to his *Prometheus Bound*, in which he showed the final reconciliation between Zeus, the oppressor, and Prometheus, the champion, of humanity. What that reconciliation was, we do not know, because the play is lost, and the fragments are too brief for supporting any probable hypothesis. But Shelley repudiated the notion of compromise. He could not conceive of the Titan "unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary." He, therefore, approached the theme of liberation from a wholly different point of view.

Prometheus in his drama is the humane vindicator of love, justice, and liberty, as opposed to Jove, the tyrannical oppressor, and creator of all evil by his selfish rule. Prometheus is the mind of man idealized, the spirit of our race, as Shelley thought it made to be. Jove is the incarnation of all that thwarts its free development. Thus counterposed, the two chief actors represent the fundamental antitheses of good and evil, liberty and despotism, love and hate. They give the form of personality to Shelley's Ormuzd-Ahriman dualism already expressed in the first canto of *Laon and Cythna*; but instead of being represented on the theatre of human life, the strife is now removed into the region of abstractions, vivified by mythopoeetry. Prometheus resists Jove to the uttermost, endures all torments, physical and moral, that the tyrant plagues him with, secure in his own strength and calmly expectant of an hour which shall hurl Jove from heaven, and leave the spirit of good triumphant. That hour arrives; Jove disappears; the burdens of the world and men are suddenly removed; a new age of peace and freedom and illimitable energy begins; the whole universe partakes in the emancipation; the spirit of the earth no longer groans in pain, but sings alternate love-songs with his sister orb, the moon; Prometheus is re-united in indissoluble bonds to his old love, Asia. Asia, withdrawn from sight during the first act, but spoken of as waiting in her exile for the fated hour, is the true mate of the human spirit. She is the fairest daughter of Earth and Ocean. Like Aphrodite, she rises in the Ægean near the land called by her name; and in the time of tribulation she dwells in a far Indian vale. She is the Idea of Beauty incarnate, the shadow of the Light of Life which sustains the world and enkindles it with love, the reality of Alastor's



vision, the breathing image of the awful loveliness apostrophized in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, the reflex of the splendour of which Adonais was a part. At the moment of her triumph she grows so beautiful that Ione her sister cannot see her, only feels her influence. The essential thought of Shelley's creed was that the universe is penetrated, vitalized, made real by a spirit, which he sometimes called the Spirit of Nature, but which is always conceived as more than Life, as that which gives its actuality to Life, and lastly as Love and Beauty. To adore this spirit, to clasp it with affection, and to blend with it, is, he thought, the true object of man. Therefore, the final union of Prometheus with Asia is the consummation of human destinies. Love was the only law Shelley recognized. Unterrified by the grim realities of pain and crime revealed in nature and society, he held fast to the belief that, if we could but pierce to the core of things, if we could but be what we might be, the world and man would both attain to their perfection in eternal love. What resolution through some transcendental harmony was expected by Shelley for the palpable discords in the structure of the universe, we hardly know. He did not give his philosophy systematic form : and his new science of love remains a luminous poetic vision—nowhere more brilliantly set forth than in the “sevenfold hallelujahs and harping symphonies” of this, the final triumph of his lyrical poetry.

In *Prometheus*, Shelley conceived a colossal work of art, and sketched out the main figures on a scale of surpassing magnificence. While painting in these figures, he seems to reduce their proportions too much to the level of earthly life. He quits his god-creating, heaven-compelling throne of mythopœic inspiration, and descends to

a love-story of Asia and Prometheus. In other words, he does not sustain the visionary and primeval dignity of these incarnated abstractions ; nor, on the other hand, has he so elaborated their characters in detail as to give them the substantiality of persons. There is therefore something vague and hollow in both figures. Yet in the subordinate passages of the poem, the true mythopœic faculty—the faculty of finding concrete forms for thought, and of investing emotion with personality—shines forth with extraordinary force and clearness. We feel ourselves in the grasp of a primitive myth-maker while we read the description of Oceanus, and the raptures of the Earth and Moon.

A genuine liking for *Prometheus Unbound* may be reckoned the touch-stone of a man's capacity for understanding lyric poetry. The world in which the action is supposed to move, rings with spirit voices ; and what these spirits sing, is melody more purged of mortal dross than any other poet's ear has caught, while listening to his own heart's song, or to the rhythms of the world. There are hymns in *Prometheus*, which seem to realize the miracle of making words, detached from meaning, the substance of a new ethereal music ; and yet although their verbal harmony is such, they are never devoid of definite significance for those who understand. Shelley scorned the æsthetics of a school which finds "sense swooning into nonsense" admirable. And if a critic is so dull as to ask what "Life of Life ! thy lips enkindle" means, or to whom it is addressed, none can help him any more than one can help a man whose sense of hearing is too gross for the tenuity of a bat's cry. A voice in the air thus sings the hymn of Asia at the moment of her apotheosis :—



Life of Life ! thy lips enkindle
With their love the breath between them ;
And thy smiles before they dwindle
Make the cold air fire ; then screen them
In those looks where whose gazes
Faints, entangled in their mazes.

Child of Light ! thy limbs are burning
Through the vest which seems to hide them,
As the radiant lines of morning
Through the clouds, ere they divide them ;
And this atmosphere divinest
Shrouds thee wheresoe'er thou shinest.

Fair are others ; none beholds thee.
But thy voice sounds low and tender,
Like the fairest, for it folds thee
From the sight, that liquid splendour,
And all feel, yet see thee never,
As I feel now, lost for ever !

Lamp of Earth ! where'er thou movest
Its dim shapes are clad with brightness,
And the souls of whom thou lovest
Walk upon the winds with lightness,
Till they fail, as I am failing,
Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing !

It has been said that Shelley, as a landscape painter, is decidedly Turner-esque ; and there is much in *Prometheus Unbound* to justify this opinion. The scale of colour is light and aerial, and the darker shadows are omitted. An excess of luminousness seems to be continually radiated from the objects at which he looks ; and in this radiation of many-coloured lights, the outline itself is apt to be a little misty. Shelley, moreover, pierced through things to their spiritual essence. The actual world was less for him than that which lies within it and beyond it. "I seek," he says himself, "in what I see, the manifestation of some-

thing beyond the present and tangible object." For him, as for the poet described by one of the spirit voices in *Prometheus*, the bees in the ivy-bloom are scarcely heeded; they become in his mind,—

Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality.

And yet who could have brought the bees, the lake, the sun, the bloom, more perfectly before us than that picture does? ¹ What vignette is more exquisitely coloured and finished than the little study of a pair of halcyons in the third act? ² Blake is perhaps the only artist who could have illustrated this drama. He might have shadowed forth the choirs of spirits, the trailing voices and their thrilling songs, phantasmal Demogorgon, and the charioted Hour. Prometheus, too, with his "flowing limbs," has just Blake's fault of impersonation—the touch of unreality in that painter's Adam.

Passing to *The Cenci*, we change at once the moral and artistic atmosphere. The lyrical element, except for one most lovely dirge, is absent. Imagery and description are alike sternly excluded. Instead of soaring to the empyrean, our feet are firmly planted on the earth. In exchange for radiant visions of future perfection, we are brought into the sphere of dreadful passions—all the agony, endurance, and half-maddened action, of which luckless human innocence is capable. To tell the legend of Beatrice Cenci here, is hardly needed. Her father, a monster of vice and cruelty, was bent upon breaking her spirit by imprisonment, torture, and nameless outrage. At last her patience ended; and finding no redress in human justice, no champion of her helplessness in living man, she

¹ Forman, vol. ii. p. 181.

² Ibid. p. 231.

wrought his death. For this she died upon the scaffold, together with her step-mother and her brothers, who had aided in the execution of the murder. The interest of *The Cenci*, and it is overwhelmingly great, centres in Beatrice and her father; from these two chief actors in the drama, all the other characters fall away into greater or less degrees of unsubstantiality. Perhaps Shelley intended this—as the maker of a bas-relief contrives two or three planes of figures for the presentation of his ruling group. Yet there appears to my mind a defect of accomplishment, rather than a deliberate intention, in the delineation of Orsino. He seems meant to be the wily, crafty, Machiavellian reptile, whose calculating wickedness should form a contrast to the dæmonic, reckless, almost maniacal fiendishness of old Francesco Cenci. But this conception of him wavers; his love for Beatrice is too delicately tinted, and he is suffered to break down with an infirmity of conscience alien to such a nature. On the other hand the uneasy vacillations of Giacomo, and the irresolution, born of feminine weakness and want of fibre, in Lucrezia, serve to throw the firm will of Beatrice into prominent relief; while her innocence, sustained through extraordinary suffering in circumstances of exceptional horror—the innocence of a noble nature thrust by no act of its own but by its wrongs beyond the pale of ordinary womankind—is contrasted with the merely childish guiltlessness of Bernardo. Beatrice rises to her full height in the fifth act, dilates and grows with the approach of danger, and fills the whole scene with her spirit on the point of death. Her sublime confidence in the justice and essential rightness of her action, the glance of self-assured purity with which she annihilates the cut-throat brought to testify against her, her song in prison, and her

tender solicitude for the frailer Lucrezia, are used with wonderful dramatic skill for the fulfilment of a feminine ideal at once delicate and powerful. Once and once only does she yield to ordinary weakness; it is when the thought crosses her mind that she may meet her father in the other world, as once he came to her on earth.

Shelley dedicated *The Cenci* to Leigh Hunt, saying that he had striven in this tragedy to cast aside the subjective manner of his earlier work, and to produce something at once more popular and more concrete, more sober in style, and with a firmer grasp on the realities of life. He was very desirous of getting it acted, and wrote to Peacock requesting him to offer it at Covent Garden. Miss O'Neil, he thought, would play the part of Beatrice admirably. The manager, however, did not take this view; averring that the subject rendered it incapable of being even submitted to an actress like Miss O'Neil. Shelley's self-criticism is always so valuable, that it may be well here to collect what he said about the two great dramas of 1819. Concerning *The Cenci* he wrote to Peacock:—"It is written without any of the peculiar feelings and opinions which characterise my other compositions; I having attended simply to the impartial development of such characters, as it is probable the persons represented really were, together with the greatest degree of popular effect to be produced by such a development." "*Cenci* is written for the multitude, and ought to sell well." "I believe it singularly fitted for the stage." "*The Cenci* is a work of art; it is not coloured by my feelings, nor obscured by my metaphysics. I don't think much of it. It gave me less trouble than anything I have written of the same length." *Prometheus*, on the other hand, he tells Ollier, "is my favourite poem; I charge you, there-

fore, specially to pet him and feed him with fine ink and good paper"—which was duly done. Again:—"For *Prometheus*, I expect and desire no great sale; *Prometheus* was never intended for more than five or six persons; it is in my judgment of a higher character than anything I have yet attempted, and is perhaps less an imitation of anything that has gone before it; it is original, and cost me severe mental labour." Shelley was right in judging that *The Cenci* would be comparatively popular; this was proved by the fact that it went through two editions in his lifetime. The value he set upon *Prometheus* as the higher work, will hardly be disputed. Unique in the history of literature, and displaying the specific qualities of its author at their height, the world could less easily afford to lose this drama than *The Cenci*, even though that be the greatest tragedy composed in English since the death of Shakespera. For reasons which will be appreciated by lovers of dramatic poetry, I refrain from detaching portions of these two plays. Those who desire to make themselves acquainted with their author's genius, must devote long and patient study to the originals in their entirety.

Prometheus Unbound, like the majority of Shelley's works, fell still-born from the press. It furnished punsters with a joke, however, which went the round of several papers; this poem, they cried, is well named, for who would bind it? Of criticism that deserves the name, Shelley got absolutely nothing in his lifetime. The stupid but venomous reviews which gave him occasional pain, but which he mostly laughed at, need not now be mentioned. It is not much to any purpose to abuse the authors of mere rubbish. The real lesson to be learned from such of them as may possibly have been sincere, as well as from the failure of his contemporaries to appreciate

his genius—the sneers of Moore, the stupidity of Campbell, the ignorance of Wordsworth, the priggishness of Southey, or the condescending tone of Keats—is that nothing is more difficult than for lesser men or equals to pay just homage to the greatest in their lifetime. Those who may be interested in studying Shelley's attitude toward his critics, should read a letter addressed to Ollier from Florence, October 15, 1819, soon after he had seen the vile attack upon him in the *Quarterly*, comparing this with the fragments of an expostulatory letter to the Editor, and the preface to *Adonais*.¹ It is clear that, though he bore scurrilous abuse with patience, he was prepared if needful to give blow for blow. On the 11th of June, 1821, he wrote to Ollier:—"As yet I have laughed; but woe to those scoundrels if they should once make me lose my temper!" The stanzas on the *Quarterly* in *Adonais*, and the invective against Lord Eldon, show what Shelley could have done if he had chosen to castigate the curs. Meanwhile the critics achieved what they intended. Shelley, as Trelawny emphatically tells us, was universally shunned, coldly treated by Byron's friends at Pisa, and regarded as a monster by such of the English in Italy as had not made his personal acquaintance. On one occasion he is even said to have been knocked down in a post-office by some big bully, who escaped before he could obtain his name and address; but this is one of the stories rendered doubtful by lack of precise details.

¹ Shelley Memorials, p. 121. Garnett's Relics of Shelley, pp. 49, 190. Collected Letters, p. 147, in Moxon's Edition of Works in one vol. 1840.

CHAPTER VI.

RESIDENCE AT PISA.

ON the 26th of January, 1820, the Shelleys established themselves at Pisa. From this date forward to the 7th of July, 1822, Shelley's life divides itself into two periods of unequal length ; the first spent at Pisa, the baths of San Giuliano, and Leghorn ; the second at Lerici on the Bay of Spezia. Without entering into minute particulars of dates or recording minor changes of residence, it is possible to treat of the first and longer period in general. The house he inhabited at Pisa was on the south side of the Arno. After a few months he became the neighbour of Lord Byron, who engaged the Palazzo Lanfranchi in order to be near him ; and here many English and Italian friends gathered round them. Among these must be mentioned in the first place Captain Medwin, whose recollections of the Pisan residence are of considerable value, and next Captain Trelawny, who has left a record of Shelley's last days only equalled in vividness by Hogg's account of the Oxford period, and marked by signs of more unmistakable accuracy. Not less important members of this private circle were Mr. and Mrs. Edward Elcker Williams, with whom Shelley and his wife lived on terms of the closest friendship. Among

foreigners, the physician Vacca, the improvisatore Sgricci, and the Greek prince Mavrocordato, have to be recorded. It will be seen from this enumeration that Shelley was no longer solitary; and indeed it would appear that now, upon the eve of his accidental death, he had begun to enjoy an immunity from many of his previous sufferings. Life expanded before him: his letters show that he was concentrating his powers and preparing for a fresh flight; and the months, though ever productive of poetic masterpieces, promised a still more magnificent birth in the future.

In the summer and autumn of 1820, Shelley produced some of his most genial poems: the *Letter to Maria Gisborne*, which might be mentioned as a pendant to *Julian and Maddalo* for its treatment of familiar things; the *Ode to a Skylark*, that most popular of all his lyrics; the *Witch of Atlas*, unrivalled as an Ariel-flight of fairy fancy; and the *Ode to Naples*, which, together with the *Ode to Liberty*, added a new lyric form to English literature. In the winter he wrote the *Sensitive Plant*, prompted thereto, we are told, by the flowers which crowded Mrs. Shelley's drawing-room, and exhaled their sweetness to the temperate Italian sunlight. Whether we consider the number of these poems or their diverse character, ranging from verse separated by an exquisitely subtle line from simple prose to the most impassioned eloquence and the most ethereal imagination, we shall be equally astonished. Every chord of the poet's lyre is touched, from the deep bass string that echoes the diurnal speech of such a man as Shelley was, to the fine vibrations of a treble merging its rarity of tone in accents super-sensible to ordinary ears. One passage from the *Letter to Maria Gisborne* may here be

quoted, not for its poetry, but for the light it casts upon the circle of his English friends.

You are now

In London, that great sea, whose ebb and flow
At once is deaf and loud, and on the shore
Vomits its wrecks, and still howls on for more.
Yet in its depth what treasures! You will see
That which was Godwin,—greater none than he
Though fallen—and fallen on evil times—to stand
Among the spirits of our age and land,
Before the dread tribunal of *To come*
The foremost, while Rebuke cowers pale and dumb.
You will see Coleridge—he who sits obscure
In the exceeding lustre and the pure
Intense irradiation of a mind,
Which, with its own internal lightning blind,
Flags wearily through darkness and despair—
A cloud-encircled meteor of the air,
A hooded eagle among blinking owls.
You will see Hunt; one of those happy souls
Which are the salt of the earth, and without whom
This world would smell like what it is—a tomb;
Who is, what others seem. His room no doubt
Is still adorned by many a cast from Shout,
With graceful flowers tastefully placed about;
And coronals of bay from ribbons hung,
And brighter wreaths in neat disorder flung,
The gifts of the most learn'd among some dozens
Of female friends, sisters-in-law, and cousins.
And there is he with his eternal puns,
Which beat the dullest brain for smiles, like duns
Thundering for money at a poet's door;
Alas! it is no use to say, "I'm poor!"—
Or oft in graver mood, when he will look
Things wiser than were ever read in book,
Except in Shakespere's wisest tenderness.
You will see Hogg; and I cannot express
His virtues, though I know that they are great,
Because he locks, then barricades the gate

Within which they inhabit. Of his wit
And wisdom, you'll cry out when you are bit.
He is a pearl within an oyster-shell,
One of the richest of the deep. And there
Is English Peacock, with his mountain fair,—
Turn'd into a Flamingo, that shy bird
That gleams in the Indian air. Have you not heard
When a man marries, dies, or turns Hindoo,
His best friends hear no more of him. But you
Will see him, and will like him too, I hope,
With the milk-white Snowdonian antelope
Match'd with this camelopard. His fine wit
Makes such a wound, the knife is lost in it ;
A strain too learned for a shallow age,
Too wise for selfish bigots ; let his page
Which charms the chosen spirits of the time,
Fold itself up for the serener clime
Of years to come, and find its recompense
In that just expectation. Wit and sense,
Virtue and human knowledge ; all that might
Make this dull world a business of delight,
Are all combined in Horace Smith. And these,
With some exceptions, which I need not tease
Your patience by descanting on, are all
You and I know in London.

Captain Medwin, who came late in the autumn of 1820, at his cousin's invitation, to stay with the Shelleys, has recorded many interesting details of their Pisan life, as well as valuable notes of Shelley's conversation. " It was nearly seven years since we had parted, but I should have immediately recognized him in a crowd. His figure was emaciated, and somewhat bent, owing to near-sightedness, and his being forced to lean over his books, with his eyes almost touching them ; his hair, still profuse, and curling naturally, was partially interspersed with grey ; but his appearance was youthful. There was also a freshness and purity in his complexion that he never

lost." Not long after his arrival, Medwin suffered from a severe and tedious illness. "Shelley tended me like a brother. He applied my leeches, administered my medicines, and during six weeks that I was confined to my room, was assiduous and unintermitting in his affectionate care of me." The poet's solitude and melancholy at this time impressed his cousin very painfully. Though he was producing a long series of imperishable poems, he did not take much interest in his work. "I am disgusted with writing," he once said, "and were it not for an irresistible impulse, that predominates my better reason, should discontinue so doing." The brutal treatment he had lately received from the *Quarterly Review*, the calumnies which pursued him, and the coldness of all but a very few friends, checked his enthusiasm for composition. Of this there is abundant proof in his correspondence. In a letter to Leigh Hunt, dated Jan. 25, 1822, he says: "My faculties are shaken to atoms and torpid. I can write nothing; and if *Adonais* had no success, and excited no interest, what incentive can I have to write?" Again: "I write little now. It is impossible to compose except under the strong excitement of an assurance of finding sympathy in what you write." Lord Byron's company proved now, as before, a check rather than an incentive to production: "I do not write; I have lived too long near Lord Byron, and the sun has extinguished the glow-worm; for I cannot hope, with St. John, that *the light came into the world and the world knew it not.*" "I despair of rivalling Lord Byron, as well I may, and there is no other with whom it is worth contending." To Ollier, in 1820, he wrote: "I doubt whether I shall write more. I could be content either with the hell or the paradise of poetry; but the torments of its purgatory

vex me, without exciting my powers sufficiently to put an end to the vexation." It was not that his spirit was cowed by the Reviews, or that he mistook the sort of audience he had to address. He more than once acknowledged that, while Byron wrote for the many, his poems were intended for the understanding few. Yet the *συγχοῖ*, as he called them, gave him but scanty encouragement. The cold phrases of kindly Horace Smith show that he had not comprehended *Prometheus Unbound*; and Shelley whimsically complains that even intelligent and sympathetic critics confounded the ideal passion described in *Epipsychidion* with the love affairs of "a servant-girl and her sweetheart." This almost incomprehensible obtuseness on the part of men who ought to have known better, combined with the coarse abuse of vulgar scribblers, was enough to make a man so sincerely modest as Shelley doubt his powers, or shrink from the severe labour of developing them.¹ "The decision of the cause," he wrote to Mr. Gisborne, "whether or no *I* am a poet, is removed from the present time to the hour when our posterity shall assemble; but the court is a very severe one, and I fear that the verdict will be, guilty—death." Deep down in his own heart he had, however, less doubt: "This I know," he said to Medwin, "that whether in prosing or in versing, there is something in my writings that shall live for ever." And again he writes to Hunt: "I am full of thoughts and plans, and should do something, if the feeble and irritable frame which encloses it was willing to obey the spirit. I fancy that then I should do great things." It seems almost certain that the incompleteness of many longer works

¹ See Medwin, vol. ii. p. 172, for Shelley's comment on the difficulty of the poet's art.

designed in the Italian period, the abandonment of the tragedy on Tasso's story, the unfinished state of *Charles I.*, and the failure to execute the cherished plan of a drama suggested by the Book of Job, were due to the depressing effects of ill-health and external discouragement. Poetry with Shelley was no light matter. He composed under the pressure of intense excitement, and he elaborated his first draughts with minute care and severe self-criticism.

These words must not be taken as implying that he followed the Virgilian precedent of polishing and reducing the volume of his verses by an anxious exercise of calm reflection, or that he observed the Horatian maxim of deferring their publication till the ninth year. The contrary was notoriously the case with him. Yet it is none the less proved by the state of his manuscripts that his compositions, even as we now possess them, were no mere improvisations. The passage already quoted from his *Defence of Poetry* shows the high ideal he had conceived of the poet's duty toward his art; and it may be confidently asserted that his whole literary career was one long struggle to emerge from the incoherence of his earlier efforts, into the clearness of expression and precision of form that are the index of mastery over style. At the same time it was inconsistent with his most firmly rooted æsthetic principles, to attempt composition except under an impulse approaching to inspiration. To imperil his life by the fiery taxing of all his faculties, moral, intellectual and physical, and to undergo the discipline exacted by his own fastidious taste, with no other object in view than the frigid compliments of a few friends, was more than even Shelley's enthusiasm could endure. He, therefore, at this period required the powerful stimulus of some highly exciting cause from without to determine his activity.

Such external stimulus came to Shelley from three quarters early in the year 1821. Among his Italian acquaintances at Pisa, was a clever but disreputable Professor, of whom Medwin draws a very piquant portrait. This man one day related the sad story of a beautiful and noble lady, the Contessina Emilia Viviani, who had been confined by her father in a dismal convent of the suburbs, to await her marriage with a distasteful husband. Shelley, fired as ever by a tale of tyranny, was eager to visit the fair captive. The Professor accompanied him and Medwin to the convent-parlour, where they found her more lovely than even the most glowing descriptions had led them to expect. Nor was she only beautiful. Shelley soon discovered that she had "cultivated her mind beyond what I have ever met with in Italian women;" and a rhapsody composed by her upon the subject of Uranian Love—*Il Vero Amore*—justifies the belief that she possessed an intellect of more than ordinary elevation. He took Mrs. Shelley to see her, and both did all they could to make her convent-prison less irksome, by frequent visits, by letters, and by presents of flowers and books. It was not long before Shelley's sympathy for this unfortunate lady took the form of love, which, however spiritual and Platonic, was not the less passionate. The result was the composition of *Epipsychidion*, the most unintelligible of all his poems to those who have not assimilated the spirit of Plato's *Symposium* and Dante's *Vita Nuova*. In it he apostrophizes Emilia Viviani as the incarnation of ideal beauty, the universal loveliness made visible in mortal flesh:—

Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be human,
Veiling beneath that radiant form of woman
All that is insupportable in thee
Of light, and love, and immortality!



He tells her that he loves her, and describes the troubles and deceptions of his earlier manhood, under allegories veiled in deliberate obscurity. The Pandemic and the Uranian Aphrodite have striven for his soul; for though in youth he dedicated himself to the service of ideal beauty, and seemed to find it under many earthly shapes, yet has he ever been deluded. At last Emily appears, and in her he recognizes the truth of the vision veiled from him so many years. She and Mary shall henceforth, like sun and moon, rule the world of love within him. Then he calls on her to fly. They three will escape and live together, far away from men, in an *Ægean* island. The description of this visionary isle, and of the life to be led there by the fugitives from a dull and undiscerning world, is the most beautiful that has been written this century in the rhymed heroic metre.

It is an isle under Ionian skies,
Beautiful as a wreck of Paradise;
And, for the harbours are not safe and good,
This land would have remained a solitude
But for some pastoral people native there,
Who from the Elysian, clear, and golden air
Draw the last spirit of the age of gold,
Simple and spirited, innocent and bold.
The blue *Ægean* girds this chosen home,
With ever-changing sound and light and foam
Kissing the sifted sands and caverns hoar;
And all the winds wandering along the shore
Undulate with the undulating tide.
There are thick woods where sylvan forms abide;
And many a fountain, rivulet, and pond,
As clear as elemental diamond,
Or serene morning air. And far beyond,
The mossy tracks made by the goats and deer,
(Which the rough shepherd treads but once a year.)
Pierce into glades, caverns, and bowers, and halls
Built round with ivy, which the waterfalls

Illumining, with sound that never fails
Accompany the noonday nightingales ;
And all the place is peopled with sweet airs.
The light clear element which the isle wears
Is heavy with the scent of lemon-flowers,
Which floats like mist laden with unseen showers,
And falls upon the eyelids like faint sleep ;
And from the moss violets and jonquils peep,
And dart their arrowy odour through the brain,
Till you might faint with that delicious pain.
And every motion, odour, beam, and tone,
With that deep music is in unison :
Which is a soul within a soul—they seem
Like echoes of an antenatal dream.
It is an isle 'twixt heaven, air, earth, and sea,
Cradled, and hung in clear tranquillity ;
Bright as that wandering Eden, Lucifer,
Washed by the soft blue oceans of young air.
It is a favoured place. Famine or Blight,
Pestilence, War, and Earthquake, never light
Upon its mountain-peaks ; blind vultures, they
Sail onward far upon their fatal way.
The wingèd storms, chanting their thunder-psalm
To other lands, leave azure chasms of calm
Over this isle, or weep themselves in dew,
From which its fields and woods ever renew
Their green and golden immortality.
And from the sea there rise, and from the sky
There fall, clear exhalations, soft and bright,
Veil after veil, each hiding some delight,
Which sun or moon or zephyr draws aside,
Till the isle's beauty, like a naked bride
Glowing at once with love and loveliness,
Blushes and trembles at its own excess :
Yet, like a buried lamp, a soul no less
Burns in the heart of this delicious isle,
An atom of the Eternal, whose own smile
Unfolds itself, and may be felt not seen
O'er the grey rocks, blue waves, and forests green
Filling their bare and void interstices.



Shelley did not publish *Epipsychidion* with his own name. He gave it to the world as the composition of a man who had "died at Florence, as he was preparing for a voyage to one of the Sporades," and he requested Ollier not to circulate it, except among a few intelligent readers. It may almost be said to have been never published, in such profound silence did it issue from the press. Very shortly after its appearance he described it to Leigh Hunt as "a portion of me already dead," and added this significant allusion to its subject matter:—"Some of us have in a prior existence been in love with an Antigone, and that makes us find no full content in any mortal tie." In the letter of June 18, 1822, again he says:—"The *Epipsychidion* I cannot look at; the person whom it celebrates was a cloud instead of a Juno; and poor Ixion starts from the Centaur that was the offspring of his own embrace. If you are curious, however, to hear what I am and have been, it will tell you something thereof. It is an idealized history of my life and feelings. I think one is always in love with something or other; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal." This paragraph contains the essence of a just criticism. Brilliant as the poem is, we cannot read it with unwavering belief either in the author's sincerity at the time he wrote it, or in the permanence of the emotion it describes. The exordium has a fatal note of rhetorical exaggeration, not because the kind of passion is impossible, but because Shelley does not convince us that in this instance he had really been its subject. His own critique, following so close upon the publication of *Epipsychidion*, confirms the impression made by it, and justifies the conclusion that he had utilized

his feeling for Emilia to express a favourite doctrine in impassioned verse.

To students of Shelley's inner life *Epipsychidion* will always have high value, independently of its beauty of style, as containing his doctrine of love. It is the full expression of the esoteric principle presented to us in *Alastor*, the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, and *Prince Athanase*. But the words just quoted, which may be compared with Mrs. Shelley's note to *Prince Athanase*, authorize our pointing out what he himself recognized as the defect of his theory. Instead of remaining true to the conception of Beauty expressed in the *Hymn*, Shelley "sought through the world the One whom he may love." Thus, while his doctrine in *Epipsychidion* seems Platonic, it will not square with the *Symposium*. Plato treats the love of a beautiful person as a mere initiation into divine mysteries, the first step in the ladder that ascends to heaven. When a man has formed a just conception of the universal beauty, he looks back with a smile upon those who find their soul's sphere in the love of some mere mortal object. Tested by this standard, Shelley's identification of Intellectual Beauty with so many daughters of earth, and his worshipping love of Emilia, is a spurious Platonism. Plato would have said that to seek the Idea of Beauty in Emilia Viviani was a retrogressive step. All that she could do, would be to quicken the soul's sense of beauty, to stir it from its lethargy, and to make it divine the eternal reality of beauty in the super-sensual world of thought. This Shelley had already acknowledged in the *Hymn*; and this he emphasizes in these words:—"The error consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal."

The fragments and cancelled passages published in Forman's edition do not throw much light upon *Epipsy-*

chidion. The longest, entitled *To his Genius* by its first editor, Mr. Garnett, reads like the induction to a poem conceived and written in a different key, and at a lower level of inspiration. It has, however, this extraordinary interest that it deals with a love which is both love and friendship, above sex, spiritual, unintelligible to the world at large. Thus the fragment enables the student better to realize the kind of worship so passionately expressed in *Epipsychidion*.

The news of Keats's death at Rome on the 27th of December, 1820, and the erroneous belief that it had been accelerated, if not caused, by a contemptible review of *Endymion* in the *Quarterly*, stirred Shelley to the composition of *Adonais*. He had it printed at Pisa, and sent copies to Ollier for circulation in London. This poem was a favourite with its author, who hoped not only that it might find acceptance with the public, but also that it would confer lustre upon the memory of a poet whom he sincerely admired. No criticisms upon Shelley's works are half so good as his own. It is, therefore, interesting to collect the passages in which he speaks of an elegy only equalled in our language by *Lycidas*, and in the point of passionate eloquence even superior to Milton's youthful lament for his friend. "The *Adonais*, in spite of its mysticism," he writes to Ollier, "is the least imperfect of my compositions." "I confess I should be surprised if that poem were born to an immortality of oblivion." "It is a highly wrought *piece of art*, and perhaps better, in point of composition, than anything I have written." "It is absurd in any review to criticize *Adonais*, and still more to pretend that the verses are bad." "I know what to think of *Adonais*, but what to think of those who confound it with the many bad poems of the day, I know not." Again, alluding to the

stanzas hurled against the infamous *Quarterly* reviewer, he says :—" I have dipped my pen in consuming fire for his destroyers ; otherwise the style is calm and solemn."

With these estimates the reader of to-day will cordially agree. Although *Adonais* is not so utterly beyond the scope of other poets as *Prometheus* or *Epipsychidion*, it presents Shelley's qualities in a form of even and sustained beauty, brought within the sphere of the dullest apprehensions. Shelley, we may notice, dwells upon the *art* of the poem ; and this, perhaps, is what at first sight will strike the student most. He chose as a foundation for his work those laments of Bion for Adonis, and of Moschus for Bion, which are the most pathetic products of Greek idyllic poetry ; and the transmutation of their material into the substance of highly spiritualized modern thought, reveals the potency of a Prospero's wand. It is a metamorphosis whereby the art of excellent but positive poets has been translated into the sphere of metaphysical imagination. Urania takes the place of Aphrodite ; the thoughts and fancies and desires of the dead singer are substituted for Bion's cupids ; and instead of mountain shepherds, the living bards of England are summoned to lament around the poet's bier. Yet it is only when Shelley frees himself from the influence of his models, that he soars aloft on mighty wing. This point too, is the point of transition from death, sorrow, and the past to immortality, joy, and the rapture of the things that cannot pass away. The first and second portions of the poem are, at the same time, thoroughly concordant, and the passage from the one to the other is natural. Two quotations from *Adonais* will suffice to show the power and sweetness of its verse.

The first is a description of Shelley himself following Byron and Moore—the " Pilgrim of Eternity," and Ierne's

"sweetest lyrist of her saddest wrong"—to the couch where Keats lies dead. There is both pathos and unconscious irony in his making these two poets the chief mourners, when we remember what Byron wrote about Keats in *Don Juan*, and what Moore afterwards recorded of Shelley; and when we think, moreover, how far both Keats and Shelley have outsoared Moore, and disputed with Byron his supreme place in the heaven of poetry.

Midst others of less note, came one frail Form,
A phantom among men, companionless
As the last cloud of an expiring storm,
Whose thunder is its knell. He, as I guess,
Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness,
Actæon-like, and now he fled astray
With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness,
And his own thoughts, along that rugged way,
Pursued like raging hounds their father and their prey.

A pard-like Spirit beautiful and swift—
A Love in desolation masked—a Power
Girt round with weakness; it can scarce uplift
The weight of the superincumbent hour;
It is a dying lamp, a falling shower,
A breaking billow;—even whilst we speak
Is it not broken? On the withering flower
The killing sun smiles brightly: on a cheek
The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may break.

His head was bound with pansies over-blown,
And faded violets, white and pied and blue;
And a light spear topped with a cypress cone,
Round whose rude shaft dark ivy-tresses grew
Yet dripping with the forest's noon-day dew,
Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart
Shook the weak hand that grasped it. Of that crew
He came the last, neglected and apart;
A herd-abandoned deer, struck by the hunter's dart.

The second passage is the peroration of the poem. No-where has Shelley expressed his philosophy of man's re-

lation to the universe with more sublimity and with a more imperial command of language than in these stanzas. If it were possible to identify that philosophy with any recognized system of thought, it might be called pantheism. But it is difficult to affix a name, stereotyped by the usage of the schools, to the aerial spiritualism of its ardent and impassioned poet's creed.

The movement of the long melodious sorrow-song has just been interrupted by three stanzas, in which Shelley lashes the reviewer of Keats. He now bursts forth afresh into the music of consolation:—

Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep!
 He hath awakened from the dream of life.
 'Tis we who, lost in stormy visions, keep
 With phantoms an unprofitable strife,
 And in mad trance strike with our spirit's knife
 Invulnerable nothings. We decay
 Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief
 Convulse us and consume us day by day,
 And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay.

He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
 Envy and calumny, and hate and pain,
 And that unrest which men miscall delight,
 Can touch him not and torture not again;
 From the contagion of the world's slow stain
 He is secure, and now can never mourn
 A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain;
 Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,
 With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.

He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead, not he;
 Mourn not for Adonais.—Thou young Dawn,
 Turn all thy dew to splendour, for from thee
 The spirit thou lamentest is not gone;
 Ye caverns and ye forests, cease to moan!
 Cease, ye faint flowers and fountains, and thou Air
 Which like a mourning veil thy scarf hadst thrown
 O'er the abandoned Earth, now leave it bare
 Even to the joyous stars which smile on its despair!

He is made one with Nature : there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird ;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own ;
Which wields the world with never wearied love,
Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.

He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely : he doth bear
His part, while the One Spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
All new successions to the forms they wear ;
Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight
To its own likeness, as each mass may bear ;
And bursting in its beauty and its might
From trees and beasts and men into the Heaven's light.

But the absorption of the human soul into primeval nature-forces, the blending of the principle of thought with the universal spirit of beauty, is not enough to satisfy man's yearning after immortality. Therefore in the next three stanzas the indestructibility of the personal self is presented to us, as the soul of Adonais passes into the company of the illustrious dead who, like him, were untimely slain :—

The splendours of the firmament of time
May be eclipsed, but are extinguished not :
Like stars to their appointed height they climb,
And death is a low mist which cannot blot
The brightness it may veil. When lofty thought
Lifts a young heart above its mortal lair,
And love and life contend in it, for what
Shall be its earthly doom, the dead live there,
And move like winds of light on dark and stormy air.

The inheritors of unfulfilled renown
 Rose from their thrones, built beyond mortal thought,
 Far in the Unapparent. Chatterton
 Rose pale, his solemn agony had not
 Yet faded from him; Sidney, as he fought
 And as he fell and as he lived and loved,
 Sublimely mild, a Spirit without spot,
 Arose; and Lucan, by his death approved :—
 Oblivion as they rose, shrank like a thing reproved.

And many more, whose names on Earth are dark,
 But whose transmitted effluence cannot die
 So long as fire outlives the parent spark,
 Rose, robed in dazzling immortality.
 "Thou art become as one of us," they cry;
 "It was for thee yon kingless sphere has long
 Swung blind in unascended majesty,
 Silent alone amid an Heaven of song.
 Assume thy wingèd throne, thou Vesper of our throng!"

From the more universal and philosophical aspects of his theme, the poet once more turns to the special subject that had stirred him. Adonais lies dead; and those who mourn him, must seek his grave. He has escaped: to follow him is to die; and where should we learn to dote on death unterrified, if not in Rome? In this way the description of Keats's resting-place beneath the pyramid of Cestius, which was also destined to be Shelley's own, is introduced:—

Who mourns for Adonais? oh come forth,
 Fond wretch! and show thyself and him aright.
 Clasp with thy panting soul the pendulous Earth;
 As from a centre, dart thy spirit's light
 Beyond all worlds, until its spacious might
 Sate the void circumference: then shrink
 Even to a point within our day and night;
 And keep thy heart light, let it make thee sink
 When hope has kindled hope, and lured thee to the brink.

Or go to Rome, which is the sepulchre,
 Oh, not of him, but of our joy: 'tis nought
 That ages, empires, and religions there
 Lie buried in the ravage they have wrought ;
 For such as he can lend,—they borrow not
 Glory from those who made the world their prey;
 And he is gathered to the kings of thought
 Who waged contention with their time's decay,
 And of the past are all that cannot pass away.

Go thou to Rome,—at once the Paradise,
 The grave, the city, and the wilderness ;
 And where its wrecks like shattered mountains rise,
 And flowering weeds and fragrant copses dress
 The bones of Desolation's nakedness,
 Pass, till the Spirit of the spot shall lead
 Thy footsteps to a slope of green access,
 Where, like an infant's smile, over the dead
 A light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread ;

And grey walls moulder round, on which dull Time
 Feeds, like slow fire upon a hoary brand ;
 And one keen pyramid with wedge sublime,
 Pavilioning the dust of him who planned
 This refuge for his memory, doth stand
 Like flame transformed to marble ; and beneath,
 A field is spread, on which a newer band
 Have pitched in Heaven's smile their camp of death,
 Welcoming him we lose with scarce extinguished breath.

Here pause: these graves are all too young as yet
 To have outgrown the sorrow which consigned
 Its charge to each ; and if the seal is set,
 Here, on one fountain of a mourning mind,
 Break it not thou ! too surely shalt thou find
 Thine own well full, if thou returnest home,
 Of tears and gall. From the world's bitter wind
 Seek shelter in the shadow of the tomb.
 What Adonais is, why fear we to become ?

Yet again the thought of Death as the deliverer, the
 revealer, and the mystagogue, through whom the soul of

man is reunited to the spirit of the universe, returns ; and on this solemn note the poem closes. The symphony of exultation which had greeted the passage of Adonais into the eternal world, is here subdued to a graver key, as befits the mood of one whom mystery and mourning still oppress on earth. Yet even in the somewhat less than jubilant conclusion we feel that highest of all Shelley's qualities—the liberation of incalculable energies, the emancipation and expansion of a force within the soul, victorious over circumstance, exhilarated and elevated by contact with such hopes as make a feeblér spirit tremble:

The One remains, the many change and pass ;
 Heaven's light for ever shines, Earth's shadows fly ;
 Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
 Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
 Until Death tramples it to fragments.—Die,
 If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek !
 Follow where all is fled !—Rome's azure sky,
 Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak
 The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.

Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart ?
 Thy hopes are gone before : from all things here
 They have departed ; thou shouldst now depart !
 A light is past from the revolving year,
 And man and woman ; and what still is dear
 Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.
 The soft sky smiles, the low wind whispers near :
 'Tis Adonais calls ! oh, hasten thither !
 No more let Life divide what Death can join together.

That light whose smile kindles the Universe,
 That beauty in which all things work and move,
 That benediction which the eclipsing curse
 Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
 Which through the web of being blindly wove

By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me ; my spirit's bark is driven
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given.
The massy earth and spherèd skies are riven !
I am borne darkly, fearfully afar ;
Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

It will be seen that whatever Shelley may from time to time have said about the immortality of the soul, he was no materialist, and no believer in the extinction of the spiritual element by death. Yet he was too wise to dogmatize upon a problem which by its very nature admits of no solution in this world. "I hope," he said, "but my hopes are not unmixed with fear for what will befall this inestimable spirit when we appear to die." On another occasion he told Trelawny : "I am content to see no farther into futurity than Plato and Bacon. My mind is tranquil ; I have no fears and some hopes. In our present gross material state our faculties are clouded ; when Death removes our clay coverings, the mystery will be solved." How constantly the thought of death as the revealer was present to his mind, may be gathered from an incident related by Trelawny. They were bathing in the Arno, when Shelley, who could not swim, plunged into deep water, and "lay stretched out at the bottom like a conger eel, not making the least effort or struggle to save himself." Trelawny fished him out, and when he had taken breath, he said : "I always find the bottom of the well,

and they say Truth lies there. In another minute I should have found it, and you would have found an empty shell. Death is the veil which those who live call life ; they sleep, and it is lifted." Yet being pressed by his friend, he refused to acknowledge a formal and precise belief in the imperishability of the human soul. "We know nothing ; we have no evidence ; we cannot express our inmost thoughts. They are incomprehensible even to ourselves." The clear insight into the conditions of the question conveyed by the last sentence is very characteristic of Shelley. It makes us regret the non-completion of his essay on a *Future Life*, which would certainly have stated the problem with rare lucidity and candour, and would have illuminated the abyss of doubt with a sense of spiritual realities not often found in combination with wise suspension of judgment. What he clung to amid all perplexities, was the absolute and indestructible existence of the universal as perceived by us in love, beauty, and delight. Though the destiny of the personal self be obscure, these things cannot fail. The conclusion of the *Sensitive Plant* might be cited as conveying the quintessence of his hope upon this most intangible of riddles.

Whether the Sensitive Plant, or that
Which within its boughs like a spirit sat,
Ere its outward form had known decay,
Now felt this change, I cannot say.

I dare not guess ; but in this life
Of error, ignorance, and strife,
Where nothing is, but all things seem,
And we the shadows of the dream :

It is a modest creed, and yet
Pleasant, if one considers it,
To own that death itself must be,
Like all the rest, a mockery.

That garden sweet, that lady fair,
 And all sweet shapes and odours there,
 In truth have never passed away :
 'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed ; not they.

For love, and beauty, and delight,
 There is no death nor change ; their might
 Exceeds our organs, which endure
 No light, being themselves obscure.

But it is now time to return from this digression to the poem which suggested it, and which, more than any other, serves to illustrate its author's mood of feeling about the life beyond the grave. The last lines of *Adonais* might be read as a prophecy of his own death by drowning. The frequent recurrence of this thought in his poetry is, to say the least, singular. In *Alastor* we read :—

A restless impulse urged him to embark
 And meet lone Death on the drear ocean's waste ;
 For well he knew that mighty Shadow loves
 The slimy caverns of the populous deep.

The *Ode to Liberty* closes on the same note :—

As a far taper fades with fading night ;
 As a brief insect dies with dying day,
 My song, its pinions disarrayed of might,
 Drooped. O'er it closed the echoes far away
 Of the great voice which did its flight sustain,
 As waves which lately paved his watery way
 Hiss round a drowner's head in their tempestuous play.

The *Stanzas written in Dejection, near Naples*, echo the thought with a slight variation :—

Yet now despair itself is mild,
 Even as the winds and waters are ;
 I could lie down like a tired child,
 And weep away the life of care

Which I have borne, and yet must bear,—
Till death like sleep might steal on me,
And I might feel in the warm air
My cheek grow cold, and hear the sea
Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony.

Trelawny tells a story of his friend's life at Lerici, which further illustrates his preoccupation with the thought of death at sea. He took Mrs. Williams and her children out upon the bay in his little boat one afternoon, and starting suddenly from a deep reverie, into which he had fallen, exclaimed with a joyful and resolute voice, "Now let us together solve the great mystery!" Too much value must not be attached to what might have been a mere caprice of utterance. Yet the proposal not unreasonably frightened Mrs. Williams, for Shelley's friends were accustomed to expect the realization of his wildest fancies. It may incidentally be mentioned that before the water finally claimed its victim, he had often been in peril of life upon his fatal element—during the first voyage to Ireland, while crossing the Channel with Mary in an open boat, again at Meillerie with Byron, and once at least with Williams.

A third composition of the year 1821 was inspired by the visit of Prince Mavrocordato to Pisa. He called on Shelley in April, showed him a copy of Prince Ipsilanti's proclamation, and announced that Greece was determined to strike a blow for freedom. The news aroused all Shelley's enthusiasm, and he began the lyrical drama of *Hellas*, which he has described as "a sort of imitation of the *Persæ* of *Æschylus*." We find him at work upon it in October; and it must have been finished by the end of that month, since the dedication bears the date of November 1st, 1821. Shelley did not set great store by it.

"It was written," he says, "without much care, and in one of those few moments of enthusiasm which now seldom visit me, and which make me pay dear for their visits." The preface might, if space permitted, be cited as a specimen of his sound and weighty judgment upon one of the greatest political questions of this century. What he says about the debt of the modern world to ancient Hellas, is no less pregnant than his severe strictures upon the part played by Russia in dealing with Eastern questions. For the rest, the poem is distinguished by passages of great lyrical beauty, rising at times to the sublimest raptures, and closing on the half-pathetic cadence of that well-known Chorus, "The world's great age begins anew." Of dramatic interest it has but little; nor is the play, as finished, equal to the promise held forth by the superb fragment of its so-called Prologue.¹ This truly magnificent torso must, I think, have been the commencement of the drama as conceived upon a different and more colossal plan, which Shelley rejected for some unknown reason. It shows the influence not only of the Book of Job, but also of the Prologue in Heaven to Faust, upon his mind.

The lyric movement of the Chorus from *Hellas*, which I propose to quote, marks the highest point of Shelley's rhythmical invention. As for the matter expressed in it, we must not forget that these stanzas are written for a Chorus of Greek captive women, whose creed does not prevent their feeling a regret for the "mightier forms of an older, austerer worship." Shelley's note reminds the reader, with characteristic caution and frankness, that "the popular notions of Christianity are represented in this Chorus as true in their relation to the worship they

¹ Forman, iv. p. 95.

superseded, and that which in all probability they will supersede, without considering their merits in a relation more universal."

Worlds on worlds are rolling ever
From creation to decay,
Like the bubbles on a river
Sparkling, bursting, borne away.
But they are still immortal
Who, through birth's orient portal,
And death's dark chasm hurrying to and fro,
Clothe their unceasing flight
In the brief dust and light
Gathered around their chariots as they go ;
New shapes they still may weave,
New gods, new laws receive ;
Bright or dim are they, as the robes they last
On Death's bare ribs had cast.

A power from the unknown God,
A Promethean conqueror came ;
Like a triumphal path he trod
The thorns of death and shame.
A mortal shape to him
Was like the vapour dim
Which the orient planet animates with light.
Hell, Sin, and Slavery came,
Like bloodhounds mild and tame,
Nor preyed until their Lord had taken flight.
The moon of Mahomet
Arose, and it shall set :
While blazoned as on heaven's immortal noon
The cross leads generations on.

Swift as the radiant shapes of sleep
From one whose dreams are paradise,
Fly, when the fond wretch wakes to weep,
And day peers forth with her blank eyes ;
So fleet, so faint, so fair,
The Powers of earth and air

Fled from the folding star of Bethlehem :
Apollo, Pan, and Love,
And even Olympian Jove
Grew weak, for killing Truth had glared on them.
Our hills, and seas, and streams,
Dispeopled of their dreams,
Their waters turned to blood, their dew to tears,
Wailed for the golden years.

In the autumn of this year Shelley paid Lord Byron a visit at Ravenna, where he made acquaintance with the Countess Guiccioli. It was then settled that Byron, who had formed the project of starting a journal to be called *The Liberal* in concert with Leigh Hunt, should himself settle in Pisa. Leigh Hunt was to join his brother poets in the same place. The prospect gave Shelley great pleasure, for he was sincerely attached to Hunt ; and though he would not promise contributions to the journal, partly lest his name should bring discredit on it, and partly because he did not choose to appear before the world as a hanger-on of Byron's, he thoroughly approved of a plan which would be profitable to his friend by bringing him into close relation with the most famous poet of the age.¹ That he was not without doubts as to Byron's working easily in harness with Leigh Hunt, may be seen in his correspondence ; and how fully these doubts were destined to be confirmed, is only too well known.

At Ravenna he was tormented by the report of some more than usually infamous calumny, concerning the position of Miss Clairmont in his household. That it made profound impression on his mind, appears from a remarkable letter addressed to his wife on the 16th and 17th of August from Ravenna. In it he repeats his growing weariness, and his wish to escape

¹ See the Letter to Leigh Hunt, Pisa, Aug. 26, 1821.

from society to solitude; the weariness of a nature wounded and disappointed by commerce with the world, but neither soured nor driven to fury by cruel wrongs. It is noticeable at the same time that he clings to his present place of residence:—"our roots never struck so deeply as at Pisa, and the transplanted tree flourishes not." At Pisa he had found real rest and refreshment in the society of his two friends, the Williamseas. Some of his saddest and most touching lyrics of this year are addressed to Jane—for so Mrs. Williams was called; and attentive students may perceive that the thought of Emilia was already blending by subtle transitions with the new thought of Jane. One poem, almost terrible in its intensity of melancholy, is hardly explicable on the supposition that Shelley was quite happy in his home.¹ These words must be taken as implying no reflection either upon Mary's love for him, or upon his own power to bear the slighter troubles of domestic life. He was not a spoiled child of fortune, a weak egotist, or a querulous complainer. But he was always seeking and never finding the satisfaction of some deeper craving. In his own words, he had loved Antigone before he visited this earth: and no one woman could probably have made him happy, because he was for ever demanding more from love than it can give in the mixed circumstances of mortal life. Moreover, it must be remembered that his power of self-expression has bestowed permanent form on feelings which may have been but transitory; nor can we avoid the conclusion that, sincere as Shelley was, he, like all poets, made use of the emotion of the moment for purposes of art, converting an ephemeral mood into something typical and universal. This was almost certainly the case with *Epipsychidion*.

¹ "The Serpent is shut out from Paradise."

So much at any rate had to be said upon this subject ; for careful readers of Shelley's minor poems are forced to the conviction that during the last year of his life he often found relief from a wretchedness, which, however real, can hardly be defined, in the sympathy of this true-hearted woman. The affection he felt for Jane was beyond question pure and honourable. All the verses he addressed to her, passed through her husband's hands without the slightest interruption to their intercourse ; and Mrs. Shelley, who was not unpardonably jealous of her Ariel, continued to be Mrs. Williams's warm friend. A passage from Shelley's letter of June 18, 1822, expresses the plain prose of his relation to the Williamses :—"They are people who are very pleasing to me. But words are not the instruments of our intercourse. I like Jane more and more, and I find Williams the most amiable of companions. She has a taste for music, and an eloquence of form and motions that compensate in some degree for the lack of literary refinement."

Two lyrics of this period may here be introduced, partly for the sake of their intrinsic beauty, and partly because they illustrate the fecundity of Shelley's genius during the months of tranquil industry which he passed at Pisa. The first is an Invocation to Night :—

Swiftly walk over the western wave,
Spirit of Night !
Out of the misty eastern cave,
Where all the long and lone daylight,
Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear,
Which make thee terrible and dear,—
Swift be thy flight !

Wrap thy form in a mantle grey,
Star-inwrought !
Blind with thine hair the eyes of day,

Kiss her until she be wearied out.
Then wander o'er city, and sea, and land,
Touching all with thine opiate wand—
Come, long-sought !

When I arose and saw the dawn,
I sighed for thee ;
When light rode high, and the dew was gone,
And noon lay heavy on flower and tree,
And the weary Day turned to his rest,
Lingering like an unloved guest,
I sighed for thee.

Thy brother Death came, and cried,
" Wouldst thou me ? "
Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,
Murmured like a noon-tide bee,
" Shall I nestle near thy side ?
Wouldst thou me ? "—And I replied,
" No, not thee ! "

Death will come when thou art dead,
Soon, too soon—
Sleep will come when thou art fled ;
Of neither would I ask the boon
I ask of thee, beloved Night—
Swift be thine approaching flight,
Come soon, soon !

The second is an Epithalamium composed for a drama which his friend Williams was writing. Students of the poetic art will find it not uninteresting to compare the three versions of this Bridal Song, given by Mr. Forman.¹ They prove that Shelley was no careless writer.

The golden gates of sleep unbar
Where strength and beauty, met together,
Kindle their image like a star
In a sea of glassy weather !

¹ Vol. iv. p. 89.

Night, with all thy stars look down—
Darkness, weep thy holiest dew !
Never smiled the inconstant moon
On a pair so true.
Let eyes not see their own delight ;
Haste, swift Hour, and thy flight
Oft renew.

Fairies, sprites, and angels, keep her !
Holy stars, permit no wrong !
And return to wake the sleeper,
Dawn, ere it be long.
O joy ! O fear ! what will be done
In the absence of the sun !
Come along !

Lyrics like these, delicate in thought and exquisitely finished in form, were produced with a truly wonderful profusion in this season of his happiest fertility. A glance at the last section of Mr. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* shows how large a place they occupy among the permanent jewels of our literature.

The month of January added a new and most important member to the little Pisan circle. This was Captain Edward John Trelawny, to whom more than to any one else but Hogg and Mrs. Shelley, the students of the poet's life are indebted for details at once accurate and characteristic. Trelawny had lived a free life in all quarters of the globe, far away from literary cliques and the society of cities, in contact with the sternest realities of existence, which had developed his self-reliance and his physical qualities to the utmost. The impression, therefore, made on him by Shelley has to be gravely estimated by all who still incline to treat the poet as a pathological specimen of humanity. This true child of nature recognized in his new friend far more than in Byron the

stuff of a real man. "To form a just idea of his poetry, you should have witnessed his daily life; his words and actions best illustrated his writings." "The cynic Byron acknowledged him to be the best and ablest man he had ever known. The truth was, Shelley loved everything better than himself." "I have seen Shelley and Byron in society, and the contrast was as marked as their characters. The former, not thinking of himself, was as much at ease as in his own home, omitting no occasion of obliging those whom he came in contact with, readily conversing with all or any who addressed him, irrespective of age or rank, dress or address." "All who heard him felt the charm of his simple, earnest manner: while Byron knew him to be exempt from the egotism, pedantry, coxcombry, and more than all the rivalry of authorship." "Shelley's mental activity was infectious; he kept your brain in constant action." "He was always in earnest." "He never laid aside his book and magic mantle; he waved his wand, and Byron, after a faint show of defiance, stood mute. . . . Shelley's earnestness and just criticism held him captive." These sentences, and many others, prove that Trelawny, himself somewhat of a cynic, cruelly exposing false pretensions, and detesting affectation in any form, paid unreserved homage to the heroic qualities this "dreamy bard,"—"uncommonly awkward," as he also called him—bad rider and poor seaman as he was—"over-sensitive," and "eternally brooding on his own thoughts," who "had seen no more of the waking-day than a girl at a boarding-school." True to himself, gentle, tender, with the courage of a lion, "frank and outspoken, like a well-conditioned boy, well-bred and considerate for others, because he was totally devoid of selfishness and vanity," Shelley seemed to this unprejudiced companion



of his last few months that very rare product for which Diogenes searched in vain—a man.

Their first meeting must be told in Trelawny's own words—words no less certain of immortality than the fame of him they celebrate. "The Williamses received me in their earnest, cordial manner; we had a great deal to communicate to each other, and were in loud and animated conversation, when I was rather put out by observing in the passage near the open door, opposite to where I sat, a pair of glittering eyes steadily fixed on mine; it was too dark to make out whom they belonged to. With the acuteness of a woman, Mrs. Williams's eyes followed the direction of mine, and going to the doorway she laughingly said, 'Come in, Shelley, it's only our friend Tre just arrived.' Swiftly gliding in, blushing like a girl, a tall, thin stripling held out both his hands; and although I could hardly believe, as I looked at his flushed, feminine, and artless face, that it could be the poet, I returned his warm pressure. After the ordinary greetings and courtesies he sat down and listened. I was silent from astonishment: was it possible this mild-looking, beardless boy, could be the veritable monster at war with all the world?—excommunicated by the Fathers of the Church, deprived of his civil rights by the fiat of a grim Lord Chancellor, discarded by every member of his family, and denounced by the rival sages of our literature as the founder of a Satanic school? I could not believe it; it must be a hoax. He was habited like a boy, in a black jacket and trousers, which he seemed to have outgrown, or his tailor, as is the custom, had most shamefully stunted him in his 'sizings.' Mrs. Williams saw my embarrassment, and to relieve me asked Shelley what book he had in his hand? His face brightened, and he answered briskly,—

“ ‘Calderon’s *Magico Prodigioso*—I am translating some passages in it.’

“ ‘Oh, read it to us.’

“ Shoved off from the shore of commonplace incidents that could not interest him, and fairly launched on a theme that did, he instantly became oblivious of everything but the book in his hand. The masterly manner in which he analysed the genius of the author, his lucid interpretation of the story, and the ease with which he translated into our language the most subtle and imaginative passages of the Spanish poet, were marvellous, as was his command of the two languages. After this touch of his quality I no longer doubted his identity; a dead silence ensued; looking up, I asked,—

“ ‘Where is he?’

“ Mrs. Williams said, ‘Who? Shelley? Oh, he comes and goes like a spirit, no one knows when or where.’”

Two little incidents which happened in the winter of 1821-2 deserve to be recorded. News reached the Pisan circle early in December that a man who had insulted the Host at Lucca, was sentenced to be burned. Shelley proposed that the English—himself, Byron, Medwin, and their friend Mr. Taaffe—should immediately arm and ride off to rescue him. The scheme took Byron’s fancy; but they agreed to try less Quixotic measures before they had recourse to force, and their excitement was calmed by hearing that the man’s sentence had been commuted to the galleys. The other affair brought them less agreeably into contact with the Tuscan police. The party were riding home one afternoon in March, when a mounted dragoon came rushing by, breaking their ranks and nearly unhorsing Mr. Taaffe. Byron and Shelley rode after him to remonstrate; but the man struck Shelley from his saddle with

a sabre blow. The English then pursued him into Pisa, making such a clatter that one of Byron's servants issued with a pitchfork from the Casa Lanfranchi, and wounded the fellow somewhat seriously, under the impression that it was necessary to defend his master. Shelley called the whole matter "a trifling piece of business;" but it was strictly investigated by the authorities; and though the dragoon was found to have been in the wrong, Byron had to retire for a season to Leghorn. Another consequence was the exile of Count Gamba and his father from Tuscany, which led to Byron's final departure from Pisa.

The even current of Shelley's life was not often broken by such adventures. Trelawny gives the following account of how he passed his days: he "was up at six or seven, reading Plato, Sophocles, or Spinoza, with the accompaniment of a hunch of dry bread; then he joined Williams in a sail on the Arno, in a flat-bottomed skiff, book in hand, and from thence he went to the pine-forest, or some out-of-the-way place. When the birds went to roost he returned home, and talked and read until midnight." The great wood of stone pines on the Pisan Maremma was his favourite study. Trelawny tells us how he found him there alone one day, and in what state was the MS. of that prettiest lyric, *Ariel*, to *Miranda* take. "It was a frightful scrawl; words smeared out with his finger, and one upon the other, over and over in tiers, and all run together in most 'admired disorder;' it might have been taken for a sketch of a marsh overgrown with bulrushes, and the blots for wild ducks; such a dashed-off daub as self-conceited artists mistake for a manifestation of genius. On my observing this to him, he answered, 'When my brain gets heated with thought, it soon boils, and throws off images and words faster than I can skim them off. In the

morning, when cooled down, out of the rude sketch as you justly call it, I shall attempt a drawing."

A daily visit to Byron diversified existence. Byron talked more sensibly with Shelley than with his commonplace acquaintances; and when he began to gossip, Shelley retired into his own thoughts. Then they would go pistol-shooting, Byron's trembling hand contrasting with his friend's firmness. They had invented a "little language" for this sport: firing was called *tiring*; hitting, *colping*; missing, *mancating*, &c. It was in fact a kind of pigeon Italian. Shelley acquired two nick-names in the circle of his Pisan friends, both highly descriptive. He was Ariel and the Snake. The latter suited him because of his noiseless gliding movement, bright eyes and ethereal diet. It was first given to him by Byron during a reading of *Faust*. When he came to the line of Mephistophiles, "Wie meine Muhme, die berühmte Schlange" and translated it, "My aunt, the renowned Snake," Byron cried, "Then you are her nephew." Shelley by no means resented the epithet. Indeed he alludes to it in his letters and in a poem already referred to above.

Soon after Trelawny's arrival the party turned their thoughts to nautical affairs. Shelley had already done a good deal of boating with Williams on the Arno and the Serchio, and had on one occasion nearly lost his life by the capsizing of their tiny craft. They now determined to build a larger yacht for excursions on the sea; while Byron, liking the project of a summer residence upon the Bay of Spezia, made up his mind to have one too. Shelley's was to be an open boat carrying sail, Byron's, a large decked schooner. The construction of both was entrusted to a Genoese builder, under the direction of

Trelawny's friend, Captain Roberts. Such was the birth of the ill-fated *Don Juan*, which cost the lives of Shelley and Williams, and of the *Bolivar*, which carried Byron off to Genoa before he finally set sail for Greece. Captain Roberts was allowed to have his own way about the latter; but Shelley and Williams had set their hearts upon a model for their little yacht, which did not suit the Captain's notions of sea-worthiness. Williams overruled his objections, and the *Don Juan* was built according to his cherished fancy. "When it was finished," says Trelawny, "it took two tons of iron ballast to bring her down to her bearings, and then she was very crank in a breeze, though not deficient in beam. She was fast, strongly built, and Torbay rigged." She was christened by Lord Byron, not wholly with Shelley's approval; and one young English sailor, Charles Vivian, in addition to Williams and Shelley, formed her crew. "It was great fun," says Trelawny, "to witness Williams teaching the poet how to steer, and other points of seamanship. As usual, Shelley had a book in hand, saying he could read and steer at the same time, as one was mental, the other mechanical." "The boy was quick and handy, and used to boats. Williams was not as deficient as I anticipated, but over-anxious, and wanted practice, which alone makes a man prompt in emergency. Shelley was intent on catching images from the ever-changing sea and sky, he heeded not the boat." It ought finally to be added that Shelley and Williams re-christened the yacht, more to their liking, the *Ariel*.

CHAPTER VII.

LAST DAYS.

THE advance of spring made the climate of Pisa too hot for comfort ; and early in April Trelawny and Williams rode off to find a suitable lodging for themselves and the Shelleys on the Gulf of Spezia. They pitched upon a house called the Villa Magni, between Lerici and San Terenzio, which "looked more like a boat or bathing-house than a place to live in. It consisted of a terrace or ground-floor un-paved, and used for storing boat-gear and fishing-tackle, and of a single storey over it, divided into a hall or saloon and four small rooms, which had once been white-washed ; there was one chimney for cooking. This place we thought the Shelleys might put up with for the summer. The only good thing about it was a verandah facing the sea, and almost over it." When it came to be inhabited, the central hall was used for the living and eating room of the whole party. The Shelleys occupied two rooms facing each other ; the Williamses had one of the remaining chambers, and Trelawny another. Access to these smaller apartments could only be got through the saloon ; and this circumstance once gave rise to a ludicrous incident, when Shelley, having lost his clothes out bathing, had to cross, *in puris naturalibus*, not undetected, though covered in his retreat by the clever Italian hand-

maiden, through a luncheon party assembled in the dining-room. The horror of the ladies at the poet's unexpected apparition and his innocent self-defence are well described by Trelawny. Life in the villa was of the simplest description. To get food was no easy matter; and the style of the furniture may be guessed by Trelawny's laconic remark that the sea was his only washing-basin.

They settled at Villa Magni on the 1st of May, and began a course of life which was not interrupted till the final catastrophe of July 8. These few weeks were in many respects the happiest of Shelley's life. We seem to discern in his last letter of importance, recently edited by Dr. Garnett, that he was now conscious of having reached a platform from which he could survey his past achievement, and whence he would probably have risen to a loftier altitude, by the firmer and more equable exercise of powers which had been ripening during the last three years of life in Italy. Meanwhile, "I am content," he writes, "if the heaven above me is calm for the passing moment." And this tranquillity was perfect, with none of the oppressive sense of coming danger, which distinguishes the calm before a storm. He was far away from the distractions of the world he hated, in a scene of indescribable beauty, among a population little removed from the state of savages, who enjoyed the primitive pleasures of a race at one with nature, and toiled with hardy perseverance on the element he loved so well. His company was thoroughly congenial and well mixed. He spent his days in excursions on the water with Williams, or in solitary musings in his cranky little skiff, floating upon the shallows in shore, or putting out to sea and waiting for the landward breeze to bring him home. The evenings were passed upon the terrace, listening to Jane's guitar, conversing

with Trelawny, or reading his favourite poets aloud to the assembled party.

In this delightful solitude, this round of simple occupations, this uninterrupted communion with nature, Shelley's enthusiasms and inspirations revived with their old strength. He began a poem, which, if we may judge of its scale by the fragment we possess, ought to have been one of the longest, as it certainly is one of the loftiest of his masterpieces. The *Triumph of Life* is composed in no strain of compliment to the powers of this world, which quell untameable spirits, and enslave the noblest by the operation of blind passions and inordinate ambitions. It is rather a pageant of the spirit dragged in chains, led captive to the world, the flesh, and the devil. The sonorous march and sultry splendour of the terza rima stanzas, bearing on their tide of song those multitudes of forms, processionally grand, yet misty with the dust of their own trappings, and half-shrouded in a lurid robe of light, affect the imagination so powerfully that we are fain to abandon criticism and acknowledge only the dæmonic fascinations of this solemn mystery. Some have compared the *Triumph of Life* to a Panathenaic pomp: others have found in it a reflex of the burning summer heat, and blazing sea, and onward undulations of interminable waves, which were the cradle of its maker as he wrote. The imagery of Dante plays a part, and Dante has controlled the structure. The genius of the Revolution passes by: Napoleon is there, and Rousseau serves for guide. The great of all ages are arraigned, and the spirit of the world is brought before us, while its heroes pass, unveil their faces for a moment, and are swallowed in the throng that has no ending. But how Shelley meant to solve the problems he has raised, by what sublime philosophy he purposed to resolve the discords of this revela-

tion more soul-shattering than Daniel's *Mene*, we cannot even guess. The poem, as we have it, breaks abruptly with these words : "Then what is Life ? I cried"—a sentence of profoundest import, when we remember that the questioner was now about to seek its answer in the halls of Death.

To separate any single passage from a poem which owes so much of its splendour to the continuity of music and the succession of visionary images, does it cruel wrong. Yet this must be attempted ; for Shelley is the only English poet who has successfully handled that most difficult of metres, *terza rima*. His power over complicated versification cannot be appreciated except by duly noticing the method he employed in treating a structure alien, perhaps, to the genius of our literature, and even in Italian used with perfect mastery by none but Dante. To select the introduction and part of the first paragraph will inflict less violence upon the *Triumph of Life* as a whole, than to detach one of its episodes.

Swift as a spirit hastening to his task
Of glory and of good, the Sun sprang forth
Rejoicing in his splendour, and the mask
Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth.
The smokeless altars of the mountain snows
Flamed above crimson clouds, and at the birth
Of light, the Ocean's orison arose,
To which the birds tempered their matin lay.
All flowers in field or forest which unclose
Their trembling eyelids to the kiss of day,
Swinging their censers in the element,
With orient incense lit by the new ray
Burned slow and inconsumably, and sent
Their odorous sighs up to the smiling air ;
And, in succession due, did continent,

Isle, ocean, and all things that in them wear
The form and character of mortal mould,
Rise as the Sun their father rose, to bear

Their portion of the toil, which he of old
Took as his own, and then imposed on them.
But I, whom thoughts which must remain untold

Had kept as wakeful as the stars that gem
The cone of night, now they were laid asleep,
Stretched my faint limbs beneath the hoary stem

Which an old chestnut flung athwart the steep
Of a green Apennine. Before me fled
The night; behind me rose the day; the deep

Was at my feet, and Heaven above my head,—
When a strange trance over my fancy grew
Which was not slumber, for the shade it spread

Was so transparent that the scene came through
As clear as, when a veil of light is drawn
O'er evening hills, they glimmer; and I knew

That I had felt the freshness of that dawn
Bathe in the same cold dew my brow and hair,
And sate as thus upon that slope of lawn

Under the self-same bough, and heard as there
The birds, the fountains, and the ocean, hold
Sweet talk in music through the enamoured air.
And then a vision on my brain was rolled.

Such is the exordium of the poem. It will be noticed that at this point one series of the interwoven triplets is concluded. The *Triumph of Life* itself begins with a new series of rhymes, describing the vision for which preparation has been made in the preceding prelude. It is not without perplexity that an ear unaccustomed to the windings of the *terza rima*, feels its way among them. Entangled and impeded by the labyrinthine sounds, the

reader might be compared to one who, swimming in his dreams, is carried down the course of a swift river clogged with clinging and retarding water-weeds. He moves; but not without labour: yet after a while the very obstacles add fascination to his movement.

As in that trance of wondrous thought I lay,
This was the tenour of my waking dream :—
Methought I sate beside a public way

Thick strewn with summer dust, and a great stream
Of people there was hurrying to and fro,
Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam,

All hastening onward, yet none seemed to know
Whither he went, or whence he came, or why
He made one of the multitude, and so

Was borne amid the crowd, as through the sky
One of the million leaves of summer's bier ;
Old age and youth, manhood and infancy,

Mixed in one mighty torrent did appear :
Some flying from the thing they feared, and some
Seeking the object of another's fear ;

And others, as with steps towards the tomb,
Pored on the trodden worms that crawled beneath,
And others mournfully within the gloom

Of their own shadow walked and called it death ;
And some fled from it as it were a ghost,
Half fainting in the affliction of vain breath.

But more, with motions which each other crossed,
Pursued or spurned the shadows the clouds threw,
Or birds within the noon-day ether lost,

Upon that path where flowers never grew,—
And weary with vain toil and faint for thirst,
Heard not the fountains, whose melodious dew

Out of their mossy cells for ever burst;
Nor felt the breeze which from the forest told
Of grassy paths, and wood lawn-interspersed,

With over-arching elms, and caverns cold,
And violet banks where sweet dreams brood ;—but they
Pursued their serious folly as of old.

Here let us break the chain of rhymes that are unbroken in the text, to notice the extraordinary skill with which the rhythm has been woven in one paragraph, suggesting by recurrences of sound the passing of a multitude, which is presented at the same time to the eye of fancy by accumulated images. The next eleven triplets introduce the presiding genius of the pageant. Students of Petrarch's *Trionfi* will not fail to note what Shelley owes to that poet, and how he has transmuted the definite imagery of mediæval symbolism into something metaphysical and mystic.

And as I gazed, methought that in the way
The throng grew wilder, as the woods of June
When the south wind shakes the extinguished day ;

And a cold glare, intenser than the noon
But icy cold, obscured with blinding light
The sun, as he the stars. Like the young moon—

When on the sunlit limits of the night
Her white shell trembles amid crimson air,
And whilst the sleeping tempest gathers might,—

Doth, as the herald of its coming, bear
The ghost of its dead mother, whose dim form
Bends in dark ether from her infant's chair ;

So came a chariot on the silent storm
Of its own rushing splendour, and a Shape
So sate within, as one whom years deform,



Beneath a dusky hood and double cape,
Crouching within the shadow of a tomb.
And o'er what seemed the head a cloud-like crape

Was bent, a dun and faint ethereal gloom
Tempering the light. Upon the chariot beam
A Janus-visaged Shadow did assume

The guidance of that wonder-wingèd team;
The shapes which drew it in thick lightnings
Were lost:—I heard alone on the air's soft stream

The music of their ever-moving wings.
All the four faces of that charioteer
Had their eyes banded; little profit brings

Speed in the van and blindness in the rear,
Nor then avail the beams that quench the sun,
Or that with banded eyes could pierce the sphere

Of all that is, has been, or will be done.
So ill was the car guided—but it past
With solemn speed majestically on.

The intense stirring of his imagination implied by this supreme poetic effort, the solitude of Villa Magni, and the elemental fervour of Italian heat to which he recklessly exposed himself, contributed to make Shelley more than usually nervous. His somnambulism returned, and he saw visions. On one occasion he thought that the dead Allegra rose from the sea, and clapped her hands, and laughed, and beckoned to him. On another he roused the whole house at night by his screams, and remained terror-frozen in the trance produced by an appalling vision. This mood he communicated, in some measure, to his friends. One of them saw what she afterwards believed to have been his phantom, and another dreamed that he was dead. They talked much of death, and it is noticeable that the

last words written to him by Jane were these :—"Are you going to join your friend Plato?"

The Leigh Hunts at last arrived in Genoa, whence they again sailed for Leghorn. Shelley heard the news upon the 20th of June. He immediately prepared to join them ; and on the 1st of July set off with Williams in the *Don Juan*, for Leghorn, where he rushed into the arms of his old friend. Leigh Hunt, in his autobiography, writes, "I will not dwell upon the moment." From Leghorn he drove with the Hunts to Pisa, and established them in the ground-floor of Byron's Palazzo Lanfranchi, as comfortably as was consistent with his lordship's variable moods. The negotiations which had preceded Hunt's visit to Italy, raised forebodings in Shelley's mind as to the reception he would meet from Byron ; nor were these destined to be unfulfilled. Trelawny tells us how irksome the poet found it to have "a man with a sick wife, and seven disorderly children," established in his palace. To Mrs. Hunt he was positively brutal ; nor could he tolerate her self-complacent husband, who, while he had voyaged far and wide in literature, had never wholly cast the slough of Cockneyism. Hunt was himself hardly powerful enough to understand the true magnitude of Shelley, though he loved him ; and the tender solicitude of the great, unselfish Shelley, for the smaller, harmlessly conceited Hunt, is pathetic. They spent a pleasant day or two together, Shelley showing the Campo Santo and other sights of Pisa to his English friend. Hunt thought him somewhat less hopeful than he used to be, but improved in health and strength and spirits. One little touch relating to their last conversation, deserves to be recorded :—"He assented warmly to an opinion I expressed in the cathedral at Pisa, while the organ was

playing, that a truly divine religion might yet be established, if charity were really made the principle of it, instead of faith."

On the night following that day of rest, Shelley took a postchaise for Leghorn ; and early in the afternoon of the next day he set sail, with Williams, on his return voyage to Lerici. The sailor-boy, Charles Vivian, was their only companion. Trelawny, who was detained on board the *Bolivar*, in the Leghorn harbour, watched them start. The weather for some time had been unusually hot and dry. "Processions of priests and religiosi have been for several days past praying for rain ;" so runs the last entry in Williams's diary ; "but the gods are either angry or nature too powerful." Trelawny's Genoese mate observed, as the *Don Juan* stood out to sea, that they ought to have started at three a.m. instead of twelve hours later ; adding "the devil is brewing mischief." Then a sea-fog withdrew the *Don Juan* from their sight. It was an oppressively sultry afternoon. Trelawny went down into his cabin, and slept ; but was soon roused by the noise of the ships' crews in the harbour making all ready for a gale. In a short time the tempest was upon them, with wind, rain, and thunder. It did not last more than twenty minutes ; and at its end Trelawny looked out anxiously for Shelley's boat. She was nowhere to be seen, and nothing could be heard of her. In fact, though Trelawny could not then be absolutely sure of the catastrophe, she had sunk, struck in all probability by the prow of a felucca, but whether by accident or with the intention of running her down, is still uncertain.

On the morning of the third day after the storm, Trelawny rode to Pisa, and communicated his fears to Hunt. "I then went upstairs to Byron. When I told him, his lip

quivered, and his voice faltered as he questioned me." Couriers were despatched to search the sea coast, and to bring the *Bolivar* from Leghorn. Trelawny rode in person toward Via Reggio, and there found a punt, a water-keg, and some bottles, which had been in Shelley's boat. A week passed, Trelawny patrolling the shore with the coast-guardsmen, but hearing of no new discovery, until at last two bodies were cast upon the sand. One found near Via Reggio, on the 18th of July, was Shelley's. It had his jacket, "with the volume of Sophocles in one pocket, and Keats's poems in the other, doubled back, as if the reader, in the act of reading, had hastily thrust it away." The other, found near the tower of Migliarino, at about four miles' distance, was that of Williams. The sailor-boy, Charles Vivian, though cast up on the same day, the 18th of July, near Massa, was not heard of by Trelawny till the 29th.

Nothing now remained but to tell the whole dreadful truth to the two widowed women, who had spent the last days in an agony of alternate despair and hope at Villa Magni. This duty Trelawny discharged faithfully and firmly. "The next day I prevailed on them," he says, "to return with me to Pisa. The misery of that night and the journey of the next day, and of many days and nights that followed, I can neither describe nor forget." It was decided that Shelley should be buried at Rome, near his friend Keats and his son William, and that Williams's remains should be taken to England. But first the bodies had to be burned; and for permission to do this, Trelawny, who all through had taken the lead, applied to the English Embassy at Florence. After some difficulty it was granted.

What remains to be said concerning the cremation of Shelley's body on the 16th of August, must be told in

Trelawny's own words. Williams, it may be stated, had been burned on the preceding day.

"Three white wands had been stuck in the sand to mark the poet's grave, but as they were at some distance from each other, we had to cut a trench thirty yards in length, in the line of the sticks, to ascertain the exact spot, and it was nearly an hour before we came upon the grave.

"In the meantime Byron and Leigh Hunt arrived in the carriage, attended by soldiers, and the Health Officer, as before. The lonely and grand scenery that surrounded us, so exactly harmonized with Shelley's genius, that I could imagine his spirit soaring over us. The sea, with the islands of Gorgona, Capraja, and Elba, was before us; old battlemented watch-towers stretched along the coast, backed by the marble-crested Apennines glistening in the sun, picturesque from their diversified outlines, and not a human dwelling was in sight.

"As I thought of the delight Shelley felt in such scenes of loneliness and grandeur whilst living, I felt we were no better than a herd of wolves or a pack of wild dogs, in tearing out his battered and naked body from the pure yellow sand that lay so lightly over it, to drag him back to the light of day; but the dead have no voice, nor had I power to check the sacrilege—the work went on silently in the deep and unresisting sand, not a word was spoken, for the Italians have a touch of sentiment, and their feelings are easily excited into sympathy. Byron was silent and thoughtful. We were startled and drawn together by a dull, hollow sound that followed the blow of a mattock; the iron had struck a skull, and the body was soon uncovered . . . After the fire was well kindled we repeated the ceremony of the previous day; and more

wine was poured over Shelley's dead body than he had consumed during his life. This with the oil and salt made the yellow flames glisten and quiver. The heat from the sun and fire was so intense that the atmosphere was tremulous and wavy The fire was so fierce as to produce a white heat on the iron, and to reduce its contents to grey ashes. The only portions that were not consumed were some fragments of bones, the jaw, and the skull ; but what surprised us all was that the heart remained entire. In snatching this relic from the fiery furnace, my hand was severely burnt ; and had any one seen me do the act, I should have been put into quarantine."

Shelley's heart was given to Hunt, who subsequently, not without reluctance and unseemly dispute, resigned it to Mrs. Shelley. It is now at Boscombe. His ashes were sent by Trelawny to Rome and buried in the Protestant cemetery, so touchingly described by him in his letter to Peacock, and afterwards so sublimely in *Adonais*. The epitaph, composed by Hunt, ran thus : "Percy Bysshe Shelley, Cor Cordium, Natus iv. Aug. MDCCXCII. Obiit viii Jul. MDCCCXXII." To the Latin words Trelawny, faithfullest and most devoted of friends, added three lines from Ariel's song, much loved in life by Shelley :

Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.

"And so," writes Lady Shelley, "the sea and the earth closed over one who was great as a poet, and still greater as a philanthropist ; and of whom it may be said, that his wild spiritual character seems to have prepared him

for being thus snatched from life under circumstances of mingled terror and beauty, while his powers were yet in their spring freshness, and age had not come to render the ethereal body decrepit, or to wither the heart which could not be consumed by fire."

CHAPTER VIII.

EPILOGUE.

AFTER some deliberation I decided to give this little work on Shelley the narrative rather than the essay form, impelled thereto by one commanding reason. Shelley's life and his poetry are indissolubly connected. He acted what he thought and felt, with a directness rare among his brethren of the poet's craft; while his verse, with the exception of *The Cenci*, expressed little but the animating thoughts and aspirations of his life. That life, moreover, was "a miracle of thirty years," so crowded with striking incident and varied experience that, as he said himself, he had already lived longer than his father and ought to be reckoned with the men of ninety. Through all vicissitudes he preserved his youth inviolate, and died, like one whom the gods love, or like a hero of Hellenic story, young, despite grey hairs and suffering. His life has, therefore, to be told, in order that his life-work may be rightly valued: for, great as that was, he, the man, was somehow greater; and noble as it truly is, the memory of himself is nobler.

To the world he presented the rare spectacle of a man passionate for truth, and unreservedly obedient to the right as he discerned it. The anomaly which made his practical career a failure, lay just here. The right he followed

was too often the antithesis of ordinary morality : in his desire to cast away the false and grasp the true, he over-shot the mark of prudence. The blending in him of a pure and earnest purpose with moral and social theories that could not but have proved pernicious to mankind at large, produced at times an almost grotesque mixture in his actions no less than in his verse. We cannot, therefore, wonder that society, while he lived, felt the necessity of asserting itself against him. But now that he has passed into the company of the great dead, and time has softened down the asperities of popular judgment, we are able to learn the real lesson of his life and writings. That is not to be sought in any of his doctrines, but rather in his fearless bearing, his resolute loyalty to an unselfish and in the simplest sense benevolent ideal. It is this which constitutes his supreme importance for us English at the present time. Ours is an age in which ideals are rare, and we belong to a race in which men who follow them so single-heartedly are not common.

As a poet, Shelley contributed a new quality to English literature—a quality of ideality, freedom, and spiritual audacity, which severe critics of other nations think we lack. Byron's daring is in a different region : his elemental worldliness and pungent satire do not liberate our energies, or cheer us with new hopes and splendid vistas. Wordsworth, the very antithesis to Shelley in his reverent accord with institutions, suits our meditative mood, sustains us with a sound philosophy, and braces us by healthy contact with the Nature he so dearly loved. But in Wordsworth there is none of Shelley's magnetism. What remains of permanent value in Coleridge's poetry—such work as *Christabel*, the *Ancient Mariner*, or *Kubla Khan*—is a product of pure artistic fancy, tempered by the author's

mysticism. Keats, true and sacred poet as he was, loved Nature with a somewhat sensuous devotion. She was for him a mistress rather than a Diotima; nor did he share the prophetic fire which burns in Shelley's verse, quite apart from the direct enunciation of his favourite tenets. In none of Shelley's greatest contemporaries was the lyrical faculty so paramount; and whether we consider his minor songs, his odes, or his more complicated choral dramas, we acknowledge that he was the loftiest and the most spontaneous singer of our language. In range of power he was also conspicuous above the rest. Not only did he write the best lyrics, but the best tragedy, the best translations, and the best familiar poems of his century. As a satirist and humourist, I cannot place him so high as some of his admirers do; and the purely polemical portions of his poems, those in which he puts forth his antagonism to tyrants and religions and custom in all its myriad forms, seem to me to degenerate at intervals into poor rhetoric.

While his genius was so varied and its flight so unapproached in swiftness, it would be vain to deny that Shelley, as an artist, had faults from which the men with whom I have compared him were more free. The most prominent of these are haste, incoherence, verbal carelessness, incompleteness, a want of narrative force, and a weak hold on objective realities. Even his warmest admirers, if they are sincere critics, will concede that his verse, taken altogether, is marked by inequality. In his eager self-abandonment to inspiration, he produced much that is unsatisfying simply because it is not ripe. There was no defect of power in him, but a defect of patience; and the final word to be pronounced in estimating the larger bulk of his poetry is the word immature. Not only

was the poet young; but the fruit of his young mind had been plucked before it had been duly mellowed by reflection. Again, he did not care enough for common things to present them with artistic fulness. He was intolerant of detail, and thus failed to model with the roundness that we find in Goethe's work. He flew at the grand, the spacious, the sublime; and did not always succeed in realizing for his readers what he had imagined. A certain want of faith in his own powers, fostered by the extraordinary discouragement under which he had to write, prevented him from finishing what he began, or from giving that ultimate form of perfection to his longer works which we admire in shorter pieces like the *Ode to the West Wind*. When a poem was ready, he had it hastily printed, and passed on to fresh creative efforts. If anything occurred to interrupt his energy, he flung the sketch aside. Some of these defects, if we may use this word at all to indicate our sense that Shelley might by care have been made equal to his highest self, were in a great measure the correlative of his chief quality—the ideality, of which I have already spoken. He composed with all his faculties, mental, emotional, and physical, at the utmost strain, at a white heat of intense fervour, striving to attain one object, the truest and most passionate investiture for the thoughts which had inflamed his ever-quick imagination. The result is that his finest work has more the stamp of something natural and elemental—the wind, the sea, the depth of air—than of a mere artistic product. Plato would have said: the Muses filled this man with sacred madness, and, when he wrote, he was no longer in his own control. There was, moreover, ever-present in his nature an effort, an aspiration after a better than the best this world can show,

which prompted him to blend the choicest products of his thought and fancy with the fairest images borrowed from the earth on which he lived. He never willingly composed except under the impulse to body forth a vision of the love and light and life which was the spirit of the power he worshipped. This persistent upward striving, this earnestness, this passionate intensity, this piety of soul and purity of inspiration, give a quite unique spirituality to his poems. But it cannot be expected that the colder perfections of Academic art should be always found in them. They have something of the waywardness and negligence of nature, something of the *asymmetreia* we admire in the earlier creations of Greek architecture. That Shelley, acute critic and profound student as he was, could conform himself to rule and show himself an artist in the stricter sense, is, however, abundantly proved by *The Cenci* and by *Adonais*. The reason why he did not always observe this method will be understood by those who have studied his *Defence of Poetry*, and learned to sympathize with his impassioned theory of art.

Working on this small scale, it is difficult to do barest justice to Shelley's life or poetry. The materials for the former are almost overwhelmingly copious and strangely discordant. Those who ought to meet in love over his grave, have spent their time in quarrelling about him and baffling the most eager seeker for the truth.¹ Through the turbid atmosphere of their recriminations it is impossible to discern the whole personality of the man. By careful comparison and refined manipulation of the biographical treasures at our disposal, a fair portrait of

¹ See *Lady Shelley v. Hogg*; *Trelawny v. the Shelley family*; *Peacock v. Lady Shelley*; *Garnett v. Peacock*; *Garnett v. Trelawny*; *McCarthy v. Hogg, &c., &c.*

Shelley might still be set before the reader with the accuracy of a finished picture. [That labour of exquisite art and of devoted love still remains to be accomplished, though in the meantime Mr. W. M. Rossetti's Memoir is a most valuable instalment.] Shelley in his lifetime bound those who knew him with a chain of loyal affection, impressing observers so essentially different as Hogg, Byron, Peacock, Leigh Hunt, Trelawny, Medwin, Williams, with the conviction that he was the gentlest, purest, bravest, and most spiritual being they had ever met. The same conviction is forced upon his biographer. During his four last years this most loveable of men was becoming gradually riper, wiser, truer to his highest instincts. The imperfections of his youth were being rapidly absorbed. His self-knowledge was expanding, his character mellowing, and his genius growing daily stronger. Without losing the fire that burned in him, he had been lessoned by experience into tempering its fervour; and when he reached the age of twenty-nine, he stood upon the height of his most glorious achievement, ready to unfold his wings for a yet sublimer flight. At that moment, when life at last seemed about to offer him rest, unimpeded activity, and happiness, death robbed the world of his maturity. Posterity has but the product of his cruder years, the assurance that he had already outlived them into something nobler, and the tragedy of his untimely end.

If a final word were needed to utter the unutterable sense of waste excited in us by Shelley's premature absorption into the mystery of the unknown, we might find it in the last lines of his own *Alastor*:—

Art and eloquence,
And all the shows o' the world, are frail and vain
To weep a loss that turns their light to shade.

It is a woe "too deep for tears," when all
Is left at once, when some surpassing spirit,
Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves
Those who remain behind nor sobs nor groans,
The passionate tumult of a clinging hope;
But pale despair and cold tranquillity,
Nature's vast frame, the web of human things,
Birth and the grave, that are not as they were.

APPENDIX.

(To replace pages 79-83 in text.)

THAT Shelley, early in 1814, had formed no intention of abandoning his wife is certain ; for he was re-married to her on the 24th of March (eight days after the letter I have just quoted) at St. George's, Hanover Square. This ratification of the Scotch marriage was no doubt meant to place the legitimacy of a possible heir beyond all question. Yet, if we may base conjecture upon "Stanzas, April, 1814," which undoubtedly refer to his relations with the Boinville family, it seems that in the very month after this new ceremony Shelley found the difficulties of his wedded life intolerable. He had not, however, lost his affection for Harriet. He still sought to recover her confidence and kindness. In spite of his wife's apparent coldness and want of intellectual sympathy, in spite of his own increasing alienation from the atmosphere in which she now lived, he still approached her with the feelings of a suitor and a lover. This is proved beyond all doubt by the pathetic stanzas "To Harriet : May, 1814," which have only recently been published. I may add that these verses exist in Harriet's own autograph, whence I infer that she, on her side, was not indifferent to the emotion they express.¹ Shelley begins with this apostrophe :

Thy look of love has power to calm
The stormiest passion of my soul ;
Thy gentle words are drops of balm
In life's too bitter bowl.

¹ This poem may be read in full in Professor Dowden's *Life*, vol. i. p. 413.

He then immediately adds that his cruellest grief is to have known and lost "those choicest blessings"; Harriet is proving by her coldness that she repays his most devoted love with scorn. Nevertheless he will appeal to her better nature:

Be thou, then, one among mankind
Whose heart is harder not for state,
Thou only virtuous, gentle, kind,
Amid a world of hate;
And by a slight endurance seal
A fellow-being's lasting weal.

The next stanza paints a moving picture of his own wretchedness, and beseeches her, before it is too late, to avert the calamity of an open rupture:

In mercy let him not endure
The misery of a fatal cure.

She has been yielding to false counsels and obeying the impulse of feelings which represent not her real and nobler, but her artificial and lower self:

O trust for once no erring guide!
Bid the remorseless feeling flee;
'Tis malice, 'tis revenge, 'tis pride,
'Tis anything but thee;
O deign a nobler pride to prove,
And pity if thou canst not love.

Whatever opinion the student of Shelley's history may form regarding his previous and his subsequent conduct, due weight must always be given to the accent of sincerity, of pleading sorrow, of ingenuous self-humiliation, in these touching lines. It must also be remembered that Harriet, although she treasured them and copied them in her own handwriting, apparently turned a deaf ear to their appeal, and that it was not until several weeks of solitude and misery had passed that Shelley finally sought the "fatal cure" of separation by flinging himself into the arms of Mary Godwin.

We may now affirm with confidence that in the winter and spring of 1814 an estrangement had gradually been growing up between Shelley and Harriet. Her more commonplace nature, subsiding into worldliness, began to weary

of his enthusiasms, which at the same epoch expanded somewhat unhealthily under the influences of the Boinville family. That intimacy brought into painful prominence whatever was jarring and repugnant to him in his home. While divided in this way between domesticity which had become distasteful, and the society of friends with whom he found scope for his most romantic outpourings of sensibility, Shelley fell suddenly and passionately in love with Godwin's daughter, Mary. He made her acquaintance first perhaps in May or at the beginning of June. Peacock, who lived on terms of the closest familiarity with him at this period, must deliver his testimony as to the overwhelming nature of the new attachment:—"Nothing that I ever read in tale or history could present a more striking image of a sudden, violent, irresistible, uncontrollable passion, than that under which I found him labouring when, at his request, I went up from the country to call on him in London. Between his old feelings towards Harriet, *from whom he was not then separated*, and his new passion for Mary, he showed in his looks, in his gestures, in his speech, the state of a mind 'suffering, like a little kingdom, the nature of an insurrection.' His eyes were bloodshot, his hair and dress disordered. He caught up a bottle of laudanum, and said, 'I never part from this.'"

Mary Godwin was then a girl of sixteen, "fair and fair-haired, pale indeed, and with a piercing look," to quote Hogg's description of her, as she first appeared before him on the 8th or 9th of June, 1814. With her freedom from prejudice, her tense and high-wrought sensibility, her acute intellect, enthusiasm for ideas, and vivid imagination, Mary Godwin was naturally a fitter companion for Shelley than the good Harriet, however beautiful. How he plighted his new troth, and won the hand of her who was destined to be his companion for life, may best be told in Lady Shelley's words:—

"His anguish, his isolation, his difference from other men, his gifts of genius and eloquent enthusiasm, made a deep impression on Godwin's daughter Mary, now a girl of sixteen, who had been accustomed to hear Shelley spoken of as something rare and strange. To her, as they met one eventful day in St. Pancras Churchyard, by her mother's grave,

Bysshe, in burning words, poured forth the tale of his wild past—how he had suffered, how he had been misled, and how, if supported by her love, he hoped in future years to enrol his name with the wise and good who had done battle for their fellow-men, and been true through all adverse storms to the cause of humanity. Unhesitatingly, she placed her hand in his, and linked her fortune with his own; and most truthfully, as the remaining portions of these Memorials will prove, was the pledge of both redeemed. The theories in which the daughter of the authors of *Political Justice*, and of the *Rights of Woman*, had been educated, spared her from any conflict between her duty and her affection. For she was the child of parents whose writings had had for their object to prove that marriage was one among the many institutions which a new era in the history of mankind was about to sweep away. By her father, whom she loved—by the writings of her mother, whom she had been taught to venerate—these doctrines had been rendered familiar to her mind. It was therefore natural that she should listen to the dictates of her own heart, and willingly unite her fate with one who was so worthy of her love."

The separation from Harriet, which actually took place about the middle of July, was not arranged by mutual consent, as some authorities assert, so much as by Shelley's deliberate repudiation of his partner. Yet she must be held to some degree responsible for bringing about the catastrophe by her own imprudent behaviour. At an uncertain date in the summer she went to Bath, leaving her husband in London or its neighbourhood. Although he was now becoming convinced that their union could not be prolonged, he continued to correspond with her regularly until early in July. A silence of four days then alarmed her so much that she wrote upon the 6th in great anxiety to Mr. Hookham, begging to be informed of Shelley's doings. On the 14th they met again at his request in London. What passed on this occasion is not known; but it seems tolerably certain that he informed her of his firm resolve to part from her. On the 28th of that month he departed secretly for the Continent with Mary Godwin, who had consented to share his fortunes.

It must be added that he passed through a crisis of intense suffering and excitement, bordering on madness, before he finally determined to exchange the refrigerated and uncongenial Harriet for the impassioned and sympathetic Mary.

That Shelley has to bear the burden of this act of separation from his first wife seems quite clear ; nor can I discover anything to justify his conduct, according to the commonly received opinions of the world, except incompatibility of aims and interests in 1814 between him and the woman he so recklessly married in 1811. His own peculiar justification is to be found in his avowed opinions on the subject of marriage—opinions which Harriet knew well and professed to share, and of which he had recently made ample confession in the notes to *Queen Mab*. Men and women in general, those whom Shelley was wont to style “the vulgar,” will still agree with Lord Eldon in regarding those opinions as dangerous to society. But it would be unfair, while condemning them as frankly as Shelley professed them, to blame him also because he did not conform to the opposite code of morals, for which he frequently expressed extreme abhorrence, and which he stigmatized, however wrongly, as the source of the worst social vices.

What is left of Harriet's history may be briefly told. She remained in correspondence with her husband, who showed himself always anxious for her material and moral welfare. At Bath, upon the 30th of November, 1814, she gave birth to Shelley's second child, Charles Bysshe, who eventually died in 1826. She seems to have formed other connexions at a later date, which proved unfortunate ; and on the 8th of November (?) 1816, she committed suicide by drowning in the Serpentine. It should be added that, until just before the end, she continued to live under her father's protection. The distance of time between July, 1814, and November, 1816, and the new ties formed by Harriet in the interval, prove that there was no immediate relation between Shelley's abandonment of his wife and her suicide. She had always entertained the thought of self-destruction, as Hogg, who is no adverse witness in her case, has amply recorded. It may, indeed, be permitted us to suppose that, finding her-

self for the second time unhappy in her love, she reverted to a long-since cherished scheme, and cut the knot of life and all its troubles.

So far as this is possible, I have attempted to narrate the most painful episode in Shelley's life as I conceive it to have occurred, without extenuation and without condemnation. But one important point connected with the chief incident still remains to be examined in detail.

Mr. Dowden says: "From an assurance that she (Harriet) had ceased to love him, Shelley had passed to a conviction that she had given her heart to another, and had linked her life to his."¹ This statement he repeats without qualification: "He had left her, believing she was unfaithful to him."² The documents which Mr. Dowden quotes to establish Shelley's belief in Harriet's unfaithfulness before the separation are three in number.³ First, a letter from Shelley to his second wife, dated January 11, 1817. Secondly, a letter from Godwin to Mr. W. T. Baxter, dated May 12, 1817. Thirdly, a note appended by Miss Clairmont to transcripts from her mother's letters, made some time after 1832. I have enumerated these in chronological order, because their greater or less remoteness from the year 1814 considerably affects their value as evidence regarding Shelley's belief at that period.

It must be borne in mind that Harriet committed suicide in November, 1816, and very soon after this event the Westbrook family began a suit in Chancery with the object of depriving Shelley of the custody of his two children by her. On the 11th of January, 1817, then, Shelley wrote to Mary: "I learn just now from Godwin that he has evidence that Harriet was unfaithful to me *four months* before I left England with you. If we can succeed in establishing this, our connexion will receive an additional sanction, and plea be overborne."⁴ As a matter of fact, when the pleadings began,

¹ Vol. i. p. 429.

² Vol. ii. p. 65.

³ These three documents will be found in vol. ii. p. 98; vol. i. pp. 424, 425.

⁴ Mr. Dowden omits the second sentence in his quotation. Vol. i. p. 426.

he did not establish this, nor did he allude to the matter in the memorandum he drew up of his case.¹ Godwin writes upon the 12th of May: "The late Mrs Shelley has turned out to be a woman of great levity. I know from unquestionable authority, wholly unconnected with Shelley (though I cannot with propriety be quoted for this), that she had proved herself unfaithful to her husband before their separation." On the strength of these two passages, the pith and kernel of which is that Godwin, some months after Harriet's death, credited a tale told him by an unknown person, which he repeated to Shelley, we are asked to suppose that Shelley in July, 1814, two and a half years earlier, was convinced of Harriet's infidelity. But Miss Clairmont has still to be heard. She, writing at some uncertain date subsequently to 1832, and therefore at least eighteen years after the separation, recorded that: "He (Shelley) succeeded in persuading her (Mary) by declaring that Harriet did not really care for him; that she was in love with a Major Ryan; and the child she would have was certainly not his. This Mary told me herself, adding that this justified his having another attachment." When we come to examine Miss Clairmont's reminiscences, we find them untrustworthy in so many instances that her evidence carries no weight.² In the second place it is unquestioned and unquestionable that Shelley firmly believed the second child he had by Harriet to be his own. He announced the boy's birth to his friends, had him named Charles Bysse, used him in his efforts to raise money, and passionately claimed him when Harriet's relatives refused to give him up. Yet we are invited to accept the memorandum of an inaccurate woman, penned at least eighteen years after the event, and including one palpable and serious misstatement, as proof that Shelley judged his first wife unfaithful before he eloped with Mary.

No one contends that Harriet actually broke her marriage vow before the separation. What Professor Dowden asks us to believe is that *Shelley thought* she was untrue to him at

¹ Vol. ii. p. 88.

² See Mr. Dowden's own critique of this witness in Appendix B. to vol. ii. Compare vol. i. p. 440.

that period. Miss Clairmont's evidence I reject as valueless. At the most she only reports something which Shelley is supposed to have said to Mary with the object of persuading her to elope with him, and which his subsequent conduct with regard to his son Charles Bysshe contradicted. The true inference to be drawn from Shelley's and Godwin's far more important letters in 1817 is that it was not until the latter date that the suspicion of Harriet's guilt before the separation arose. This suspicion did not, however, harden into certainty, nor was it found capable of verification; else why did not Shelley use the fact, as he proposed, in order to strengthen his case against the Westbrooks? I admit that his letter to Southey in 1820 supports the view that, having once begun to entertain the suspicion, he never afterwards abandoned it.¹

If now we turn to contemporary records between the dates, June, 1814, and May, 1815 (at which time Harriet disappears from our ken), we find no intimation either in Mary's or Miss Clairmont's diary, or in Shelley's words and writings, or in the conduct of the Shelley-Godwin set, that Harriet was believed to have broken faith so early with her husband. When Shelley in the summer of 1814 sought to lower her in the eyes of Mary Godwin, he did so by hinting that she only cared for his money and his prospects.² Mary talks about her "insulting selfishness," calls her "nasty woman," and exhibits a good deal of resentment at Shelley's welcome to his son and heir by her (December 6, 1814).³ The pained reiteration of the words *wife* in her diary on this occasion proves how bitterly she felt her own position as *mistress*. Shelley invited Harriet to establish herself in the neighbourhood of Mary and himself. She was visited in London by the whole party. But while they continued upon awkward terms of half familiarity and mutual irritation, nothing by word or act implied a knowledge of her previous infidelity. What is further to the point is that Mrs. Shelley, in her novel of *Lodore*, which Professor Dowden rightly judges to be

¹ Vol. i. p. 428.

² Vol. i. p. 415.

³ Vol. i. p. 465.

a history of Shelley's relation to Harriet, painted a wife's gradual alienation from her husband without hinting at misconduct.¹

In conclusion, I am bound to express my opinion that nothing now produced from the Shelley archives very materially alters the view of the case at which sane and cautious critics arrived before these were placed in the hands of his last biographer. We ought, moreover, to remember that Shelley, of all men, would have most resented anything like an appeal to popular opinions regarding the marriage tie. His firm conviction was that when affection ceased between a married couple, or when new loves had irrevocably superseded old ones, the connexion ought to be broken. In his own case he felt that Harriet's emotion towards him had changed, while an irresistible passion for another woman had suddenly sprung up in his heart. Upon these grounds, after undergoing a terrible contention of the soul, he forced on the separation to which his first wife unwillingly submitted.

¹ Vol. I. pp. 436-438.

THE END.

English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

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PREFACE.

WITH the name of Keats that of his first biographer, the late Lord Houghton, must always justly remain associated. But while the sympathetic charm of Lord Houghton's work will keep it fresh, as a record of the poet's life it can no longer be said to be sufficient. Since the revised edition of the *Life and Letters* appeared in 1867, other students and lovers of Keats have been busy, and much new information concerning him been brought to light, while of the old information some has been proved mistaken. No connected account of Keats's life and work, in accordance with the present state of knowledge, exists, and I have been asked to contribute such an account to the present series. I regret that lack of strength and leisure has so long delayed the execution of the task entrusted to me. The chief authorities and printed texts which I have consulted (besides the original editions of the Poems) are the following:—

1. Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries. By Leigh Hunt. London, 1828.
2. The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley. By Thomas Medwin. London, 2 vols., 1847.
3. Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats. Edited by Richard Monckton Milnes. 2 vols., London, 1848.
4. Life of Benjamin Robert Haydon. Edited and compiled by Tom Taylor. Second edition. 3 vols., London, 1853.
5. The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt, with Reminiscences of Friends and Contemporaries. 3 vols., London, 1850.

6. *The Poetical Works of John Keats*. With a memoir by Richard Monckton Milnes. London, 1854.

7. *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*. [Revised edition, edited by Thornton Hunt.] London, 1860.

8. *The Vicissitudes of Keats's Fame*: an article by Joseph Severn in the *Atlantic Monthly Magazine* for 1863 (vol. xi. p. 401).

9. *The Life and Letters of John Keats*. By Lord Houghton. New edition, London, 1867.

10. *Recollections of John Keats*: an article by Charles Cowden Clarke in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1874 (N. S. vol. xii. p. 177). Afterwards reprinted with modifications in *Recollections of Writers*, by Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke. London, 1878.

11. *The Papers of a Critic*. Selected from the writings of the late Charles Wentworth Dilke. With a biographical notice by Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, Bart., M.P. 2 vols., London, 1875.

12. *Benjamin Robert Haydon: Correspondence and Table-Talk*. With a memoir by Frederic Wordsworth Haydon. 2 vols., London, 1876.

13. *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, chronologically arranged and edited, with a memoir, by Lord Houghton [Aldine edition of the *British Poets*]. London, 1876.

14. *Letters of John Keats to Fanny Brawne*, with Introduction and Notes by Harry Buxton Forman. London, 1878.

A biographer cannot ignore these letters now that they are published: but their publication must be regretted by all who hold that human respect and delicacy are due to the dead no less than to the living, and to genius no less than to obscurity.

15. *The Poetical Works and other Writings of John Keats*. Edited with notes and appendices by Harry Buxton Forman. 4 vols., London, 1883.

In this edition, besides the texts reprinted from the first editions, all the genuine letters and additional poems published in 3, 6, 9, 13, and 14 of the above are brought together, as well as most of the biographical notices contained in 1, 2, 4,

5, 7, 10, and 12 : also a series of previously unpublished letters of Keats to his sister : with a great amount of valuable illustrative and critical material besides. Except for a few errors, which I shall have occasion to point out, Mr Forman's work might for the purpose of the student be final, and I have necessarily been indebted to it at every turn.

16. *The Letters and Poems of John Keats*. Edited by John Gilmer Speed. 3 vols., New York, 1883.

17. *The Poetical Works of John Keats*. Edited by William T. Arnold. London, 1884.

The Introduction to this edition contains the only attempt with which I am acquainted at an analysis of the formal elements of Keats's style.

18. *An Æsculapian Poet*—John Keats : an article by Dr B. W. Richardson in the *Asclepiad* for 1884 (vol. i. p. 134).

19. Notices and correspondence concerning Keats which have appeared at intervals during a number of years in the *Athenæum*.

In addition to printed materials I have made use of the following unprinted, viz. :—

I. **HOUGHTON MSS.** Under this title I refer to the contents of an album from the library at Fryston Hall, in which the late Lord Houghton bound up a quantity of the materials he had used in the preparation of the *Life and Letters*, as well as of correspondence concerning Keats addressed to him both before and after the publication of his book. The chief contents are the manuscript memoir of Keats by Charles Brown, which was offered by the writer in vain to *Galignani*, and I believe other publishers ; transcripts by the same hand of a few of Keats's poems ; reminiscences or brief memoirs of the poet by his friends Charles Cowden Clarke (the first draft of the paper above cited as no. 10), Henry Stephens, George Felton Mathew, Joseph Severn, and Benjamin Bailey ; together with letters from all the above, from John Hamilton Reynolds, and several others. For the use of this collection, without which my work must have been attempted to little purpose, I am indebted to the kindness of its owner, the present Lord Houghton.

II. **WOODHOUSE MSS. A.** A common-place book in which

Richard Woodhouse, the friend of Keats and of his publishers Messrs Taylor and Hessey, transcribed—as would appear from internal evidence, about midsummer 1819—the chief part of Keats's poems at that date unpublished. The transcripts are in many cases made from early drafts of the poems: some contain gaps which Woodhouse has filled up in pencil from later drafts: to others are added corrections, or suggestions for corrections, some made in the hand of Mr Taylor and some in that of Keats himself.

III. WOODHOUSE MSS. B. A note-book in which the same Woodhouse has copied—evidently for Mr Taylor, at the time when that gentleman was meditating a biography of the poet—a number of letters addressed by Keats to Mr Taylor himself, to the transcriber, to Reynolds and his sisters, to Rice, and Bailey. Three or four of these letters, as well as portions of a few others, are unpublished.

Both the volumes last named were formerly the property of Mrs Taylor, a niece by marriage of the publisher, and are now my own. A third note-book by Woodhouse, containing personal notices and recollections of Keats, was unluckily destroyed in the fire at Messrs Kegan Paul and Co's premises in 1883. A copy of *Endymion*, annotated by the same hand, has been used by Mr Forman in his edition (above, no. 15).

IV. SEVERN MSS. The papers and correspondence left by the late Joseph Severn, containing materials for what should be a valuable biography, have been put into the hands of Mr William Sharp, to be edited and published at his discretion. In the meantime Mr Sharp has been so kind as to let me have access to such parts of them as relate to Keats. The most important single piece, an essay on 'The Vicissitudes of Keats's Fame,' has been printed already in the *Atlantic Monthly* (above, no. 8), but in the remainder I have found many interesting details, particularly concerning Keats's voyage to Italy and life at Rome.

V. *Rawlings v. Jennings*. When Keats's maternal grandfather, Mr John Jennings, died in 1805, leaving property exceeding the amount of the specific bequests under his will, it was thought necessary that his estate should be administered

by the Court of Chancery, and with that intent a friendly suit was brought in the names of his daughter and her second husband (Frances Jennings, *m.* 1st Thomas Keats, and 2nd William Rawlings) against her mother and brother, who were the executors. The proceedings in this suit are referred to under the above title. They are complicated and voluminous, extending over a period of twenty years, and my best thanks are due to Mr Ralph Thomas, of 27 Chancery Lane, for his friendly pains in searching through and making abstracts of them.

For help and information, besides what has been above acknowledged, I am indebted first and foremost to my friend and colleague, Mr Richard Garnett; and next to the poet's surviving sister, Mrs Llanos; to Sir Charles Dilke, who lent me the chief part of his valuable collection of Keats's books and papers (already well turned to account by Mr Forman); to Dr B. W. Richardson, and the Rev. R. H. Hadden. Other incidental obligations will be found acknowledged in the footnotes.

Among essays on and reviews of Keats's work I need only refer in particular to that by the late Mrs F. M. Owen (Keats: a Study, London, 1876). In its main outlines, though not in details, I accept and have followed this lady's interpretation of *Endymion*. For the rest, every critic of modern English poetry is of necessity a critic of Keats. The earliest, Leigh Hunt, was one of the best; and to name only a few among the living—where Mr Matthew Arnold, Mr Swinburne, Mr Lowell, Mr Palgrave, Mr W. M. Rossetti, Mr W. B. Scott, Mr Roden Noel, Mr Theodore Watts, have gone before, for one who follows to be both original and just is not easy. In the following pages I have not attempted to avoid saying over again much that in substance has been said already, and doubtless better, by others: by Mr Matthew Arnold and Mr Palgrave especially. I doubt not but they will forgive me: and at the same time I hope to have contributed something of my own towards a fuller understanding both of Keats's art and life.

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KEATS.

CHAPTER I

Birth and Parentage—School Life at Enfield—Life as Surgeon's
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Hospital Student in London. [1795—1817.]

SCIENCE may one day ascertain the laws of distribution and descent which govern the births of genius; but in the meantime a birth like that of Keats presents to the ordinary mind a striking instance of nature's inscrutability. If we consider the other chief poets of the time, we can commonly recognize either some strain of power in their blood, or some strong inspiring influence in the scenery and traditions of their home. Thus we see Scott prepared alike by his origin, associations, and circumstances to be the 'minstrel of his clan' and poet of the romance of the border wilds; while the spirit of the Cumbrian hills, and the temper of the generations bred among them, speak naturally through the lips of Wordsworth. Byron seems inspired in literature by demons of the same froward brood that had urged others of his lineage through lives of adventure or of crime. But Keats, with instincts and faculties more purely poetical than any of these, was paradoxically born in a dull and middling walk of English city life; and 'if by traduction came his mind,'—to quote Dryden with a

difference,—it was through channels too obscure for us to trace. His father, Thomas Keats, was a west-country lad who came young to London, and while still under twenty held the place of head ostler in a livery-stable kept by a Mr John Jennings in Finsbury. Presently he married his employer's daughter, Frances Jennings; and Mr Jennings, who was a man of substance, retiring about the same time to live in the country, at Ponder's End, left the management of the business in the hands of his son-in-law. The young couple lived at the stable, at the sign of the Swan-and-Hoop, Finsbury Pavement, facing the then open space of Lower Moorfields. Here their eldest child, the poet JOHN KEATS, was born prematurely on either the 29th or 31st of October, 1795. A second son, named George, followed on February 28, 1797; a third, Tom, on November 18, 1799; a fourth, Edward, who died in infancy, on April 28, 1801; and on the 3rd of June, 1803, a daughter, Frances Mary. In the meantime the family had moved from the stable to a house in Craven Street, City Road, half a mile farther north¹.

In the gifts and temperament of Keats we shall find much that seems characteristic of the Celtic rather than the English nature. Whether he really had any of that blood in his veins we cannot tell. His father was a native either of Devon or of Cornwall²; and his mother's name, Jennings, is common in but not peculiar to Wales. There our evidence ends, and all that we know further of his parents is that they were certainly not quite ordinary people. Thomas Keats was noticed in his life-time as a man of intelligence and conduct—"of so remarkably fine a common sense and native

¹ See Appendix, p. 221.

² *Ibid.*

respectability," writes Cowden Clarke, in whose father's school the poet and his brothers were brought up, "that I perfectly remember the warm terms in which his demeanour used to be canvassed by my parents after he had been to visit his boys." It is added that he resembled his illustrious son in person and feature, being of small stature and lively energetic countenance, with brown hair and hazel eyes. Of his wife, the poet's mother, we learn more vaguely that she was "tall, of good figure, with large oval face, and sensible deportment": and again that she was a lively, clever, impulsive woman, passionately fond of amusement, and supposed to have hastened the birth of her eldest child by some imprudence. Her second son, George, wrote in after life of her and of her family as follows:—"my grandfather [Mr Jennings] was very well off, as his will shows, and but that he was extremely generous and gullible would have been affluent. I have heard my grandmother speak with enthusiasm of his excellencies, and Mr Abbey used to say that he never saw a woman of the talents and sense of my grandmother, except my mother." And elsewhere:—"my mother I distinctly remember, she resembled John very much in the face, was extremely fond of him, and humoured him in every whim, of which he had not a few, she was a most excellent and affectionate parent, and as I thought a woman of uncommon talents."

The mother's passion for her firstborn son was devotedly returned by him. Once as a young child, when she was ordered to be left quiet during an illness, he is said to have insisted on keeping watch at her door with an old sword, and allowing no one to go in. Haydon, an artist who loved to lay his colours thick, gives this anecdote of the sword a different turn:—"He was when

an infant a most violent and ungovernable child. At five years of age or thereabouts, he once got hold of a naked sword and shutting the door swore nobody should go out. His mother wanted to do so, but he threatened her so furiously she began to cry, and was obliged to wait till somebody through the window saw her position and came to the rescue." Another trait of the poet's childhood, mentioned also by Haydon, on the authority of a gammer who had known him from his birth, is that when he was first learning to speak, instead of answering sensibly, he had a trick of making a rhyme to the last word people said and then laughing.

The parents were ambitious for their boys, and would have liked to send them to Harrow, but thinking this beyond their means, chose the school kept by the Rev. John Clarke at Enfield. The brothers of Mrs Keats had been educated here, and the school was one of good repute, and of exceptionally pleasant aspect and surroundings. Traces of its ancient forest character lingered long, and indeed linger yet, about the neighbourhood of the picturesque small suburban town of Enfield, and the district was one especially affected by City men of fortune for their homes. The school-house occupied by Mr Clarke had been originally built for a rich West-India merchant, in the finest style of early Georgian classic architecture, and stood in a pleasant and spacious garden at the lower end of the town. When years afterwards the site was used for a railway station, the old house was for some time allowed to stand: but later it was taken down, and the façade, with its fine proportions and rich ornaments in moulded brick, was transported to the South Kensington Museum as a choice example of the style.

Not long after Keats had been put to school he lost his father, who was killed by a fall from his horse as he rode home at night from Southgate. This was on the 16th of April, 1804. Within twelve months his mother had put off her weeds, and taken a second husband—one William Rawlings, described as 'of Moorgate in the city of London, stable-keeper,' presumably therefore the successor of her first husband in the management of her father's business. This marriage turned out unhappily. It was soon followed by a separation, and Mrs Rawlings went with her children to live at Edmonton, in the house of her mother, Mrs Jennings, who was just about this time left a widow¹. In the correspondence of the Keats brothers after they were grown up, no mention is ever made of their step-father, of whom after the separation the family seem to have lost all knowledge. The household in Church Street, Edmonton, was well enough provided for, Mr Jennings having left a fortune of over £13,000, of which, in addition to other legacies, he bequeathed a capital yielding £200 a year to his widow absolutely; one yielding £50 a year to his daughter Frances Rawlings, with reversion to her Keats children after her death; and £1000 to be separately held in trust for the said children and divided among them on their coming of age². Between this home, then, and the neighbouring Enfield school, where he was in due time joined by his younger brothers, the next four or five years of Keats's boyhood (1806—1810) were passed in sufficient comfort and pleasantness. He did not live to attain the years, or the success, of men who write their remi-

¹ John Jennings died March 8, 1805.

² *Rawlings v. Jennings*. See below, p. 133, and Appendix, p. 221

niscences; and almost the only recollections he has left of his own early days refer to holiday times in his grandmother's house at Edmonton. They are conveyed in some rhymes which he wrote years afterwards by way of foolishness to amuse his young sister, and testify to a partiality, common also to little boys not of genius, for dabbling by the brookside—

“ In spite
Of the might
Of the Maid,
Nor afraid
Of his granny-good ”—

and for keeping small fishes in tubs.

If we learn little of Keats's early days from his own lips, we have sufficient testimony as to the impression which he made on his school companions; which was that of a boy all spirit and generosity, vehement both in tears and laughter, handsome, passionate, pugnacious, placable, loveable, a natural leader and champion among his fellows. But beneath this bright and mettlesome outside there lay deep in his nature, even from the first, a strain of painful sensibility making him subject to moods of unreasonable suspicion and self-tormenting melancholy. These he was accustomed to conceal from all except his brothers, between whom and himself there existed the very closest of fraternal ties. George, the second brother, had all John's spirit of manliness and honour, with a less impulsive disposition and a cooler blood: from a boy he was the bigger and stronger of the two: and at school found himself continually involved in fights for, and not unfrequently with, his small, indomitably fiery elder brother. Tom, the youngest, was always delicate, and an object of

protecting care as well as the warmest affection to the other two. The singularly strong family sentiment that united the three brothers extended naturally also to their sister, then a child: and in a more remote and ideal fashion to their uncle by the mother's side, Captain Midgley John Jennings, a tall navy officer who had served with some distinction under Duncan at Camperdown, and who impressed the imagination of the boys, in those days of militant British valour by land and sea, as a model of manly prowess¹. It may be remembered that there was a much more distinguished naval hero of the time who bore their own name—the gallant Admiral Sir Richard Godwin Keats of the *Superb*, afterwards governor of Greenwich Hospital: and he, like their father, came from the west country, being the son of a Bideford clergyman. But it seems clear that the family of our Keats claimed no connection with that of the Admiral.

Here are some of George Keats's recollections, written after the death of his elder brother, and referring partly to their school-days and partly to John's character after he was grown up:—

“I loved him from boyhood even when he wronged me, for the goodness of his heart and the nobleness of his spirit, before we left school we quarrelled often and fought fiercely, and I can safely say and my schoolfellows will bear witness that John's temper was the cause of all, still we were more attached than brothers ever are.”

“From the time we were boys at school, where we loved, jangled, and fought alternately, until we separated in 1818, I in a great measure relieved him by continual sympathy, explanation, and inexhaustible spirits and good humour, from many a bitter fit of hypochondriasm. He avoided teasing any one with his miseries but Tom and myself, and often asked

¹ Captain Jennings died October 8, 1808.

our forgiveness; venting and discussing them gave him relief."

Let us turn now from these honest and warm brotherly reminiscences to their confirmation in the words of two of Keats's school-friends; and first in those of his junior Edward Holmes, afterwards author of the *Life of Mozart* :—

"Keats was in childhood not attached to books. His *penchant* was for fighting. He would fight any one—morning, noon, and night, his brother among the rest. It was meat and drink to him....His favourites were few; after they were known to fight readily he seemed to prefer them for a sort of grotesque and buffoon humour....He was a boy whom any one from his extraordinary vivacity and personal beauty might easily fancy would become great—but rather in some military capacity than in literature. You will remark that this taste came out rather suddenly and unexpectedly.... In all active exercises he excelled. The generosity and daring of his character with the extreme beauty and animation of his face made I remember an impression on me—and being some years his junior I was obliged to woo his friendship—in which I succeeded, but not till I had fought several battles. This violence and vehemence—this pugnacity and generosity of disposition—in passions of tears or outrageous fits of laughter—always in extremes—will help to paint Keats in his boyhood. Associated as they were with an extraordinary beauty of person and expression, these qualities captivated the boys, and no one was more popular¹."

Entirely to the same effect is the account of Keats given by a school friend seven or eight years older than himself, to whose appreciation and encouragement the world most likely owes it that he first ventured into poetry. This was the son of the master, Charles Cowden Clarke, who towards the close of a long life, during

¹ Houghton MSS.

which he had deserved well of literature in more ways than one, wrote retrospectively of Keats :—

“He was a favourite with all. Not the less beloved was he for having a highly pugnacious spirit, which when roused was one of the most picturesque exhibitions—off the stage—I ever saw.... Upon one occasion, when an usher, on account of some impertinent behaviour, had boxed his brother Tom's ears, John rushed up, put himself into the received posture of offence, and, it was said, struck the usher—who could, so to say, have put him in his pocket. His passion at times was almost ungovernable; and his brother George, being considerably the taller and stronger, used frequently to hold him down by main force, laughing when John was “in one of his moods,” and was endeavouring to beat him. It was all, however, a wisp-of-straw conflagration; for he had an intensely tender affection for his brothers, and proved it upon the most trying occasions. He was not merely the favourite of all, like a pet prize-fighter, for his terrier courage; but his highmindedness, his utter unconsciousness of a mean motive, his placability, his generosity, wrought so general a feeling in his behalf, that I never heard a word of disapproval from any one, superior or equal, who had known him.”

The same excellent witness records in agreement with the last that in his earlier school-days Keats showed no particular signs of an intellectual bent, though always orderly and methodical in what he did. But during his last few terms, that is in his fourteenth and fifteenth years, all the energies of his nature turned to study. He became suddenly and completely absorbed in reading, and would be continually at work before school-time in the morning and during play-hours in the afternoon: could hardly be induced to join the school games: and never willingly had a book out of his hand. At this time he won easily all the literature prizes of the school, and in addition to his proper work imposed on himself such

voluntary tasks as the translation of the whole *Æneid* in prose. He devoured all the books of history, travel, and fiction in the school library, and was for ever borrowing more from the friend who tells the story. "In my mind's eye I now see him at supper sitting back on the form from the table, holding the folio volume of Burnet's 'History of his Own Time' between himself and the table, eating his meal from beyond it. This work, and Leigh Hunt's 'Examiner'—which my father took in, and I used to lend to Keats—no doubt laid the foundation of his love of civil and religious liberty." But the books which Keats read with the greatest eagerness of all were books of ancient mythology, and he seemed literally to learn by heart the contents of Tooke's *Pantheon*, Lempriere's *Dictionary*, and the school abridgment by Tindal of Spence's *Polymetis*—the first the most foolish and dull, the last the most scholarly and polite, of the various handbooks in which the ancient fables were presented in those days to the apprehension of youth.

Trouble fell upon Keats in the midst of these ardent studies of his latter school-days. His mother had been for some time in failing health. First she was disabled by chronic rheumatism, and at last fell into a rapid consumption, which carried her off in February 1810. We are told with what devotion her eldest boy attended her sick bed,—“he sat up whole nights with her in a great chair, would suffer nobody to give her medicine, or even cook her food, but himself, and read novels to her in her intervals of ease,”—and how bitterly he mourned for her when she was gone,—“he gave way to such impassioned and prolonged grief (hiding himself in a nook under the master's desk) as awakened the liveliest pity and sympathy in all who saw him.” In the July

following, Mrs Jennings, being desirous to make the best provision she could for her orphan grand-children, 'in consideration of the natural love and affection which she had for them,' executed a deed putting them under the care of two guardians, to whom she made over, to be held in trust for their benefit from the date of the instrument, the chief part of the property which she derived from her late husband under his will¹. The guardians were Mr Rowland Sandell, merchant, and Mr Richard Abbey, a wholesale tea-dealer in Pancras Lane. Mrs Jennings survived the execution of this deed more than four years², but Mr Abbey, with the consent of his co-trustee, seems at once to have taken up all the responsibilities of the trust. Under his authority John Keats was withdrawn from school at the close of this same year 1810, when he was just fifteen, and made to put on harness for the practical work of life. With no opposition, so far as we learn, on his own part, he was bound apprentice for a term of five years to a surgeon at Edmonton named Hammond. The only picture we have of him in this capacity has been left by R. H. Horne, the author of *Orion*, who came as a small boy to the Enfield school just after Keats had left it. One day in winter Mr Hammond had driven over to attend the school, and Keats with him. Keats was standing with his head sunk in a brown study, holding the horse, when some of the boys, who knew his school reputation for pugnacity, dared Horne to throw a snowball at him; which Horne did, hitting Keats in the back, and then taking headlong

¹ *Rawlings v. Jennings*. See Appendix, p. 221.

² Mrs Alice Jennings was buried at St Stephen's, Coleman Street, December 19, 1814, aged 78. (Communication from the Rev. J. W. Pratt, M.A.)

to his heels, to his surprise got off scot free¹. Keats during his apprenticeship used on his own account to be often to and fro between the Edmonton surgery and the Enfield school. His newly awakened passion for the pleasures of literature and the imagination was not to be stifled, and whenever he could spare time from his work, he plunged back into his school occupations of reading and translating. He finished at this time his translation of the *Æneid*, and was in the habit of walking over to Enfield once a week or oftener, to see his friend Cowden Clarke, and to exchange books and 'travel in the realms of gold' with him. In summer weather the two would sit in a shady arbour in the old school garden, the elder reading poetry to the younger, and enjoying his looks and exclamations of enthusiasm. On a momentous day for Keats, Cowden Clarke introduced him for the first time to Spenser, reading him the *Epithalamium* in the afternoon, and lending him the *Faerie Queene* to take away the same evening. It has been said, and truly, that no one who has not had the good fortune to be attracted to that poem in boyhood can ever completely enjoy it. The maturer student, appreciate as he may its inexhaustible beauties and noble temper, can hardly fail to be in some degree put out by its arbitrary forms of rhyme and diction, and wearied by its melodious redundance: he will perceive the perplexity and discontinuousness of the allegory, and the absence of real and breathing humanity, even the failure, at times, of clearness of vision and strength of grasp, amidst all that luxuriance of decorative and symbolic invention, and prodigality of romantic incident

¹ I owe this anecdote to Mr Gosse, who had it direct from Horne.

and detail. It is otherwise with the uncritical faculties and greedy apprehension of boyhood. For them there is no poetical revelation like the *Faerie Queens*, no pleasure equal to that of floating for the first time along that ever-buoyant stream of verse, by those shores and forests of enchantment, glades and wildernesses alive with glancing figures of knight and lady, oppressor and champion, mage and Saracen,—with masque and combat, pursuit and rescue, the chivalrous shapes and hazards of the woodland, and beauty triumphant or in distress. Through the new world thus opened to him Keats went ranging with delight: 'ramping' is Cowden Clarke's word: he shewed moreover his own instinct for the poetical art by fastening with critical enthusiasm on epithets of special felicity or power. For instance, says his friend, "he hoisted himself up, and looked burly and dominant, as he said, 'What an image that is—*sea-shouldering whales!*'" Spenser has been often proved not only a great awakener of the love of poetry in youth, but a great fertilizer of the germs of original poetical power where they exist; and Charles Brown, the most intimate friend of Keats during two later years of his life, states positively that it was to the inspiration of the *Faerie Queens* that his first notion of attempting to write was due. "Though born to be a poet, he was ignorant of his birthright until he had completed his eighteenth year. It was the *Faerie Queens* that awakened his genius. In Spenser's fairy land he was enchanted, breathed in a new world, and became another being; till, enamoured of the stanza, he attempted to imitate it, and succeeded. This account of the sudden development of his poetic powers I first received from his brothers, and afterwards from himself.

This, his earliest attempt, the 'Imitation of Spenser,' is in his first volume of poems, and it is peculiarly interesting to those acquainted with his history¹. Cowden Clarke places the attempt two years earlier, but his memory for dates was, as he owns, the vaguest, and we may fairly assume him to have been mistaken.

After he had thus first become conscious within himself of the impulse of poetical composition, Keats went on writing occasional sonnets and other verses: secretly and shyly at first like all young poets: at least it was not until two years later, in the spring of 1815, that he showed anything he had written to his friend and confidant, Cowden Clarke. In the meantime a change had taken place in his way of life. In the summer or autumn of 1814, more than a year before the expiration of his term of apprenticeship, he had quarrelled with Mr Hammond and left him. The cause of their quarrel is not known, and Keats's own single allusion to it is when once afterwards, speaking of the periodical change and renewal of the bodily tissues, he says "seven years ago it was not this hand which clenched itself at Hammond." It seems unlikely that the cause was any neglect of duty on the part of the poet-apprentice, who was not devoid of thoroughness and resolution in the performance even of uncongenial tasks. At all events Mr Hammond allowed the indentures to be cancelled, and Keats, being now nearly nineteen years of age, went to live in London, and continue the study of his profession as a student at the hospitals (then for teaching purposes united) of St Thomas's and Guy's. For the first winter and spring after leaving Edmonton he lodged alone at 8, Dean Street,

¹ Houghton MSS.

Borough, and then for about a year, in company with some fellow-students, over a tallow-chandler's shop in St Thomas's Street. Thence he went in the summer of 1816 to join his brothers in lodgings in the Poultry, over a passage leading to the Queen's Head tavern. In the spring of 1817 they all three moved for a short time to 76, Cheapside. Between these several addresses in London Keats spent a period of about two years and a half, from the date (which is not precisely fixed) of his leaving Edmonton in 1814 until April, 1817.

It was in this interval, from his nineteenth to his twenty-second year, that Keats gave way gradually to his growing passion for poetry. At first he seems to have worked steadily enough along the lines which others had marked out for him. His chief reputation, indeed, among his fellow students was that of a 'cheerful, crotchety rhymester,' much given to scribbling doggrel verses in his friends' note-books¹. But I have before me the MS. book in which he took down his own notes of a course, or at least the beginning of a course, of lectures on anatomy; and they are not those of a lax or inaccurate student. The only signs of a wandering mind occur on the margins of one or two pages, in the shape of sketches (rather prettily touched) of pansies and other flowers: but the notes themselves are both full and close as far as they go. Poetry had indeed already become Keats's chief interest, but it is clear at the same time that he attended the hospitals and did his

¹ A specimen of such scribble, in the shape of a fragment of romance narrative, composed in the sham Old-English of Rowley, and in prose, not verse, will be found in *The Philosophy of Mystery*, by W. C. Dendy (London, 1841), p. 99, and another, preserved by Mr H. Stephens, in the *Poetical Works*, ed. Forman (1 vol. 1884), p. 558.

work regularly, acquiring a fairly solid knowledge, both theoretical and practical, of the rudiments of medical and surgical science, so that he was always afterwards able to speak on such subjects with a certain mastery. On the 25th of July, 1816, he passed with credit his examination as licentiate at Apothecaries' Hall. He was appointed a dresser at Guy's under Mr Lucas on the 3rd of March, 1816, and the operations which he performed or assisted in are said to have proved him no bungler. But his heart was not in the work. Its scientific part he could not feel to be a satisfying occupation for his thoughts: he knew nothing of that passion of philosophical curiosity in the mechanism and mysteries of the human frame which by turns attracted Coleridge and Shelley toward the study of medicine. The practical responsibilities of the profession at the same time weighed upon him, and he was conscious of a kind of absent uneasy wonder at his own skill. Voices and visions that he could not resist were luring his spirit along other paths, and once when Cowden Clarke asked him about his prospects and feelings in regard to his profession, he frankly declared his own sense of his unfitness for it; with reasons such as this, that "the other day, during the lecture, there came a sunbeam into the room, and with it a whole troop of creatures floating in the ray; and I was off with them to Oberon and fairy-land." "My last operation," he once told Brown, "was the opening of a man's temporal artery. I did it with the utmost nicety, but reflecting on what passed through my mind at the time, my dexterity seemed a miracle, and I never took up the lancet again."

Keats at the same time was forming intimacies with

other young men of literary tastes and occupations. His verses were beginning to be no longer written with a boy's secrecy, but freely addressed to and passed round among his friends; some of them attracted the notice and warm approval of writers of acknowledged mark and standing; and with their encouragement he had about the time of his coming of age (that is in the winter of 1816-17) conceived the purpose of devoting himself to a literary life. We are not told what measure of opposition he encountered on the point from Mr Abbey, though there is evidence that he encountered some¹. Probably that gentleman regarded the poetical aspirations of his ward as mere symptoms of a boyish fever which experience would quickly cure. There was always a certain lack of cordiality in his relations with the three brothers as they grew up. He gave places in his counting-house successively to George and Tom as they left school, but they both quitted him after a while; George, who had his full share of the family pride, on account of slights experienced or imagined at the hands of a junior partner; Tom in consequence of a settled infirmity of health which early disabled him for the practical work of life. Mr Abbey continued to manage the money matters of the Keats family,—unskilfully enough as will appear,—and to do his duty by them as he understood it. Between him and John Keats there was never any formal quarrel. But that young brilliant spirit could hardly have expected a responsible tea-dealer's approval when he yielded himself to the influences now to be described.

¹ See Appendix.

CHAPTER II.

Particulars of Early Life in London—Friendships and First Poems—Henry Stephens—Felton Mathew—Cowden Clarke—Leigh Hunt: his literary and personal influence—John Hamilton Reynolds—James Rice—Cornelius Webb—Shelley—Haydon—Joseph Severn—Charles Wells—Personal characteristics—Determination to publish. [1814—April 1817.]

WHEN Keats moved from Dean Street to St Thomas's Street in the summer of 1815, he at first occupied a joint sitting-room with two senior students, to the care of one of whom he had been recommended by Astley Cooper¹. When they left he arranged to live in the same house with two other students, of his own age, named George Wilson Mackereth and Henry Stephens. The latter, who was afterwards a physician of repute near St Albans, and later at Finchley, has left some interesting reminiscences of the time². "He attended lectures," says Mr Stephens of Keats, "and went through the usual routine, but he had no desire to excel in that pursuit....Poetry was to his mind the zenith of all his aspirations—the only thing worthy the attention of superior minds—so he thought—all other pursuits were mean and tame....It may readily

¹ See C. L. Felton, *Memorials of J. F. South* (London, 1884), p. 81.

² Houghton MSS. See also Dr B. W. Richardson in the *Asclepiad*, vol. i. p. 134.

be imagined that this feeling was accompanied by a good deal of pride and some conceit, and that amongst mere medical students he would walk and talk as one of the gods might be supposed to do when mingling with mortals." On the whole, it seems, 'little Keats' was popular among his fellow-students, although subject to occasional teasing on account of his pride, his poetry, and even his birth as the son of a stable-keeper. Mr Stephens goes on to tell how he himself and a student of St Bartholomew's, a merry fellow called Newmarch, having some tincture of poetry, were singled out as companions by Keats, with whom they used to discuss and compare verses, Keats taking always the tone of authority, and generally disagreeing with their tastes. He despised Pope, and admired Byron, but delighted especially in Spenser, caring more in poetry for the beauty of imagery, description, and simile, than for the interest of action or passion. Newmarch used sometimes to laugh at Keats and his flights,—to the indignation of his brothers, who came often to see him, and treated him as a person to be exalted, and destined to exalt the family name. Questions of poetry apart, continues Mr Stephens, he was habitually gentle and pleasant, and in his life steady and well-behaved—"his absolute devotion to poetry prevented his having any other taste or indulging in any vice." Another companion of Keats's early London days, who sympathized with his literary tastes, was a certain George Felton Mathew, the son of a tradesman whose family showed the young medical student some hospitality. "Keats and I," wrote in 1848 Mr Mathew,—then a supernumerary official on the Poor-Law Board, struggling meekly under the combined strain of a precarious income, a family

of twelve children, and a turn for the interpretation of prophecy,—“Keats and I, though about the same age, and both inclined to literature, were in many respects as different as two individuals could be. He enjoyed good health—a fine flow of animal spirits—was fond of company—could amuse himself admirably with the frivolities of life—and had great confidence in himself. I, on the other hand, was languid and melancholy—fond of repose—thoughtful beyond my years—and diffident to the last degree....He was of the sceptical and republican school—an advocate for the innovations which were making progress in his time—a faultfinder with everything established. I on the other hand hated controversy and dispute—dreaded discord and disorder”¹—and Keats, our good Mr Timorous farther testifies, was very kind and amiable, always ready to apologize for shocking him. As to his poetical predilections, the impression left on Mr Mathew quite corresponds with that recorded by Mr Stephens :—“he admired more the external decorations than felt the deep emotions of the Muse. He delighted in leading you through the mazes of elaborate description, but was less conscious of the sublime and the pathetic. He used to spend many evenings in reading to me, but I never observed the tears nor the broken voice which are indicative of extreme sensibility.”

The exact order and chronology of Keats's own first efforts in poetry it is difficult to trace. They were certainly neither precocious nor particularly promising. The circumstantial account of Brown above quoted compels us to regard the lines *In Imitation of Spenser* as the earliest of all, and as written at Edmonton

¹ Houghton MSS.

about the end of 1813 or beginning of 1814. They are correct and melodious, and contain few of those archaic or experimental eccentricities of diction which we shall find abounding a little later in Keats's work. Although, indeed, the poets whom Keats loved the best both first and last were those of the Elizabethan age, it is clear that his own earliest verses were modelled timidly on the work of writers nearer his own time. His professedly Spenserian lines resemble not so much Spenser as later writers who had written in his measure, and of these not the latest, Byron¹, but rather such milder minstrels as Shenstone, Thomson, and Beattie, or most of all perhaps the sentimental Irish poetess Mrs Tighe; whose *Psyche* had become very popular since her death, and by its richness of imagery, and flowing and musical versification, takes a place, now too little recognised, among the pieces preluding the romantic movement of the time. That Keats was familiar with this lady's work is proved by his allusion to it in the lines, themselves very youthfully turned in the tripping manner of Tom Moore, which he addressed about this time to some ladies who had sent him a present of a shell. His two elegiac stanzas *On Death*, assigned by George Keats to the year 1814, are quite in an eighteenth-century style and vein of moralizing. Equally so is the address *To Hope* of February 1815, with its 'relentless fair' and its personified abstractions, 'fair Cheerfulness,' 'Disappointment, parent of Despair,' 'that fiend Despondence,' and the rest. And once more, in the ode *To Apollo* of the same date, the voice with which this young

¹ What, for instance, can be less Spenserian and at the same time less Byronic than—

"For sure so fair a place was never seen
Of all that ever charm'd romantic eye"?

singer celebrates his Elizabethan masters is an echo not of their own voice but rather of Gray's :—

“Thou biddest Shakspeare wave his hand,
And quickly forward spring
The Passions—a terrific band—
And each vibrates the string
That with its tyrant temper best accords,
While from their Master's lips pour forth the inspiring
words.

A silver trumpet Spenser blows,
And, as its martial notes to silence flee,
From a virgin chorus flows

A hymn in praise of spotless Chastity.
'Tis still! Wild warblings from the Æolian lyre
Enchantment softly breathe, and tremblingly expire.”

The pieces above cited are all among the earliest of Keats's work, written either at Edmonton or during the first year of his life in London. To the same class no doubt belongs the inexpert and boyish, almost girlish, sentimental sonnet *To Byron*, and probably that also, which is but a degree better, *To Chatterton* (both only posthumously printed). The more firmly handled but still mediocre sonnet on Leigh Hunt's release from prison brings us again to a fixed date and a recorded occasion in the young poet's life. It was on either the 2nd or the 3rd of February, 1815, that the brothers Hunt were discharged after serving out the term of imprisonment to which they had been condemned on the charge of libelling the Prince Regent two years before. Young Cowden Clarke, like so many other friends of letters and of liberty, had gone to offer his respects to Leigh Hunt in Surrey jail; and the acquaintance thus begun had warmed quickly into friendship. Within a few days of Hunt's release, Clarke walked in from Enfield to call on him (presumably at the lodging he occupied at this time in

the Edgware Road). On his return Clarke met Keats, who walked part of the way home with him, and as they parted, says Clarke, "he turned and gave me the sonnet entitled *Written on the day that Mr Leigh Hunt left prison*. This I feel to be the first proof I had received of his having committed himself in verse; and how clearly do I recollect the conscious look and hesitation with which he offered it! There are some momentary glances by beloved friends that fade only with life."

Not long afterwards Cowden Clarke left Enfield, and came to settle in London. Keats found him out in his lodgings at Clerkenwell, and the two were soon meeting as often and reading together as eagerly as ever. One of the first books they attacked was a borrowed folio copy of Chapman's *Homer*. After a night's enthusiastic study, Clarke found when he came down to breakfast the next morning, that Keats, who had only left him in the small hours, had already had time to compose and send him from the Borough the sonnet, now so famous as to be almost hackneyed, *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*:—

"Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many Western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne:
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien."

The date of the incident cannot be precisely fixed ; but it was when nights were short in the summer of 1815. The seventh line of the sonnet is an afterthought : in the original copy sent to Cowden Clarke it stood more baldly, 'Yet could I never tell what men might mean.' Keats here for the first time approves himself a poet indeed. The concluding sestet is almost unsurpassed, nor can there be a finer instance of the alchemy of genius than the image of the explorer, wherein a stray reminiscence of schoolboy reading (with a mistake, it seems, as to the name, which should be Balboa and not Cortez, but what does it matter ?) is converted into the perfection of appropriate poetry.

One of the next services which the ever zealous and affectionate Cowden Clarke did his young friend was to make him personally known to Leigh Hunt. The acquaintance carried with it in the sequel some disadvantages and even penalties, but at first was a source of unmixed encouragement and pleasure. It is impossible rightly to understand the career of Keats if we fail to realise the various modes in which it was affected by his intercourse with Hunt. The latter was the elder of the two by eleven years. He was the son, by marriage with an American wife, of an eloquent and elegant, self-indulgent and thriftless fashionable preacher of West Indian origin, who had chiefly exercised his vocation in the northern suburbs of London. Leigh Hunt was brought up at Christ's Hospital, about a dozen years later than Lamb and Coleridge, and gained at sixteen some slight degree of precocious literary reputation with a volume of juvenile poems. A few years later he came into notice as a theatrical critic, being then a clerk in the War Office ; an occupation which he abandoned at twenty-

four (in 1808) in order to join his brother John Hunt in the conduct of the *Examiner* newspaper. For five years the managers of that journal helped to fight the losing battle of liberalism, in those days of Eldon and of Castlereagh, with a dexterous brisk audacity, and a perfect sincerity, if not profoundness, of conviction. At last they were caught tripping, and condemned to two years' imprisonment for strictures ruled libellous, and really stinging as well as just, on the character and person of the Prince Regent. Leigh Hunt bore himself in his captivity with cheerful fortitude, and issued from it a sort of hero. Liberal statesmen, philosophers, and writers pressed to offer him their sympathy and society in prison, and his engaging presence, and affluence of genial conversation, charmed all who were brought in contact with him. Tall, straight, slender, and vivacious, with curly black hair, bright coal-black eyes, and 'nose of taste,' Leigh Hunt was ever one of the most winning of companions, full of kindly smiles and jests, of reading, gaiety, and ideas, with an infinity of pleasant things to say of his own, yet the most sympathetic and deferential of listeners. If in some matters he was far too easy, and especially in that of money obligations, which he shrank neither from receiving nor conferring,—only circumstances made him nearly always a receiver,—still men of sterner fibre than Hunt have more lightly abandoned graver convictions than his, and been far less ready to suffer for what they believed. Liberals could not but contrast his smiling steadfastness under persecution with the apostasy, as in the heat of the hour they considered it, of Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. In domestic life no man was more amiable and devoted under difficulties; and none was better loved by his friends, or requited

them, so far as the depth of his nature went, with a truer warmth and loyalty. His literary industry was incessant, hardly second to that of Southey himself. He had the liveliest faculty of enjoyment, coupled with a singular quickness of intellectual apprehension for the points and qualities of what he enjoyed; and for the gentler pleasures, graces, and luxuries (to use a word he loved) of literature, he is the most accomplished of guides and interpreters. His manner in criticism has at its best an easy penetration, and flowing unobtrusive felicity, most remote from those faults to which Coleridge and De Quincey, with their more philosophic powers and method, were subject, the faults of pedantry and effort. The infirmity of Leigh Hunt's style is of an opposite kind. "Incomparable," according to Lamb's well-known phrase, "as a fire-side companion," it was his misfortune to carry too much of the fire-side tone into literature, and to affect both in prose and verse, but much more in the latter, an air of chatty familiarity and ease which passes too easily into Cockney pertness.

A combination of accidents, political, personal, and literary, caused this writer of amiable memory and second-rate powers to exercise, about the time of which we are writing, a determining influence both on the work and the fortunes of stronger men. And first of his influence on their work. He was as enthusiastic a student of 'our earlier and nobler school of poetry' as Coleridge or Lamb, and though he had more appreciation than they of the characteristic excellences of the 'French school,' the school of polished artifice and restraint which had come in since Dryden, he was not less bent on its overthrow, and on the return of English poetry to the paths of nature and freedom. But he had his own

conception of the manner in which this return should be effected. He did not admit that Wordsworth with his rustic simplicities and his recluse philosophy had solved the problem. "It was his intention," he wrote in prison, "by the beginning of next year to bring out a piece of some length...in which he would attempt to reduce to practice his own ideas of what is natural in style, and of the various and legitimate harmony of the English heroic." The result of this intention was the *Story of Rimini*, begun before his prosecution and published a year after his release, in February or March, 1816. "With the endeavour," so he repeated himself in the preface, "to recur to a freer spirit of versification, I have joined one of still greater importance,—that of having a free and idiomatic cast of language."

In versification Hunt's aim was to bring back into use the earlier form of the rhymed English decasyllabic or 'heroic' couplet. The innovating poets of the time had abandoned this form of verse (Wordsworth and Coleridge using it only in their earliest efforts, before 1796); while the others who still employed it, as Campbell, Rogers, Crabbe, and Byron, adhered, each in his manner, to the isolated couplet and hammering rhymes with which the English ear had been for more than a century exclusively familiar. The two contrasted systems of handling the measure may best be understood if we compare the rhythm of a poem written in it to one of those designs in hangings or wall-papers which are made up of two different patterns in combination: a rigid or geometrical ground pattern, with a second, flowing or free pattern winding in and out of it. The regular or ground-pattern, dividing the field into even spaces, will stand for the fixed or strictly metrical divisions of the

verse into equal pairs of rhyming lines; while the flowing or free pattern stands for its other divisions—dependent not on metre but on the sense—into clauses and periods of variable length and structure. Under the older system of versification the sentence or period had been allowed to follow its own laws, with a movement untrammelled by that of the metre; and the beauty of the result depended upon the skill and feeling with which this free element of the pattern was made to play about and interweave itself with the fixed element, the flow and divisions of the sentence now crossing and now coinciding with those of the metre, the sense now drawing attention to the rhyme and now withholding it. For examples of this system and of its charm we have only to turn at random to Chaucer:—

"I-clothed was sche fresh for to devyse.
 Hir yelwe hair was browded in a tresse,
 Byhynde her bak, a yerdȝ long, I gesse,
 And in the garden as the sonne upriste
 She walketh up and down, and as hir liste
 She gathereth floures, party white and reede,
 To make a sotil garland for here heede,
 And as an aungel hevenlyche sche song."

Chaucer's conception of the measure prevails throughout the Elizabethan age, but not exclusively or uniformly. Some poets are more inobservant of the metrical division than he, and keep the movement of their periods as independent of it as possible; closing a sentence anywhere rather than with the close of the couplet, and making use constantly of the *enjambement*, or way of letting the sense flow over from one line to another, without pause or emphasis on the rhyme-word. Others show an opposite tendency, especially in epigrammatic or sententious passages, to clip their sentences to the pattern

of the metre, fitting single propositions into single lines or couplets, and letting the stress fall regularly on the rhyme. This principle gradually gained ground during the seventeenth century, as every one knows, and prevails strongly in the work of Dryden. But Dryden has two methods which he freely employs for varying the monotony of his couplets: in serious narrative or didactic verse, the use of the triplet and the Alexandrine, thus:—

“Full bowls of wine, of honey, milk, and blood
Were poured upon the pile of burning wood,
And hissing flames receive, and hungry lick the food.
Then thrice the mounted squadrons ride around
The fire, and Arcite's name they thrice resound:
'Hail and farewell,' they shouted thrice amain,
Thrice facing to the left, and thrice they turned again—:”

and in lively colloquial verse the use, not uncommon also with the Elizabethans, of disyllabic rhymes:—

“I come, kind gentlemen, strange news to tell ye;
I am the ghost of poor departed Nelly.
Sweet ladies, be not frightened; I'll be civil;
I'm what I was, a little harmless devil.”

In the hands of Pope, the poetical legislator of the following century, these expedients are discarded, and the fixed and purely metrical element in the design is suffered to regulate and control the other element entirely. The sentence-structure loses its freedom: and periods and clauses, instead of being allowed to develop themselves at their ease, are compelled mechanically to coincide with and repeat the metrical divisions of the verse. To take a famous instance, and from a passage not sententious, but fanciful and discursive:—

“Some in the fields of purest æther play,
And bask and whiten in the blaze of day.

Some guide the course of wand'ring orbs on high,
 Or roll the planets through the boundless sky.
 Some less refined, beneath the moon's pale light
 Pursue the stars that shoot across the night,
 Or seek the mists in grosser air below,
 Or dip their pinions in the painted bow,
 Or brew fierce tempests on the wintry main,
 Or o'er the globe distil the kindly rain."

Leigh Hunt's theory was that Pope, with all his skill, had spoiled instead of perfecting his instrument, and that the last true master of the heroic couplet had been Dryden, on whom the verse of *Rimini* is avowedly modelled. The result is an odd blending of the grave and the colloquial cadences of Dryden, without his characteristic nerve and energy in either :—

"The prince, at this, would bend on her an eye
 Cordial enough, and kiss her tenderly ;
 Nor, to say truly, was he slow in common
 To accept the attentions of this lovely woman,
 But the meantime he took no generous pains,
 By mutual pleasing, to secure his gains ;
 He entered not, in turn, in her delights,
 Her books, her flowers, her taste for rural sights ;
 Nay, scarcely her sweet singing minded he
 Unless his pride was roused by company ;
 Or when to please him, after martial play,
 She strained her lute to some old fiery lay
 Of fierce Orlando, or of Ferumbras,
 Or Ryan's cloak, or how by the red grass
 In battle you might know where Richard was."

It is usually said that to the example thus set by Leigh Hunt in *Rimini* is due the rhythmical form alike of *Endymion* and *Epipsychidion*, of Keats's *Epistles* to his friends and Shelley's *Letter to Maria Gisborne*. Certainly the *Epistles* of Keats, both as to sentiment and rhythm, are very much in Hunt's manner. But the earliest of

them, that to G. F. Mathew, is dated Nov. 1815: when *Rimini* was not yet published, and when it appears Keats did not yet know Hunt personally. He may indeed have known his poem in MS., through Clarke or others. Or the likeness of his work to Hunt's may have arisen independently: as to style, from a natural affinity of feeling: and as to rhythm, from a familiarity with the disyllabic rhyme and the 'overflow' as used by some of the Elizabethan writers, particularly by Spenser in *Mother Hubbard's Tale* and by Browne in *Britannia's Pastorals*. At all events the appearance of *Rimini* tended unquestionably to encourage and confirm him in his practice.

As to Hunt's success with his 'ideas of what is natural in style,' and his 'free and idiomatic cast of language' to supersede the styles alike of Pope and Wordsworth, the specimen of his which we have given is perhaps enough. The taste that guided him so well in appreciating the works of others deserted him often in original composition, but nowhere so completely as in *Rimini*. The piece indeed is not without agreeable passages of picturesque colour and description, but for the rest, the pleasant creature does but exaggerate in this poem the chief foible of his prose, redoubling his vivacious airs where they are least in place, and handling the great passions of the theme with a tea-party manner and vocabulary that are intolerable. Contemporaries, welcoming as a relief any departure from the outworn poetical conventions of the eighteenth century, found, indeed, something to praise in Leigh Hunt's *Rimini*: and ladies are said to have wept over the sorrows of the hero and heroine: but what, one can only ask, must be the sensibilities of the human being who can endure to hear the story of Paolo and Francesca—Dante's Paolo

and Francesca—diluted through four cantos in a style like this!—

“What need I tell of lovely lips and eyes,
A clipsome waist, and bosom’s balmy rise?—”

“How charming, would he think, to see her here,
How heightened then, and perfect would appear
The two divinest things the world has got,
A lovely woman in a rural spot.”

When Keats and Shelley, with their immeasurably finer poetical gifts and instincts, successively followed Leigh Hunt in the attempt to add a familiar lenity of style to variety of movement in this metre, Shelley, it need not be said, was in no danger of falling into any such underbred strain as this: but Keats at first falls, or is near falling, into it more than once.

Next as to the influence which Leigh Hunt involuntarily exercised on his friends’ fortunes and their estimation by the world. We have seen how he found himself, in prison and for some time after his release, a kind of political hero on the liberal side, a part for which nature had by no means fitted him. This was in itself enough to mark him out as a special butt for Tory vengeance: yet that vengeance would hardly have been so inveterate as it was but for other secondary causes. During his imprisonment Leigh Hunt had reprinted from the *Reflector*, with notes and additions, an airily presumptuous trifle in verse called the *Feast of the Poets*, which he had written about two years before. In it Apollo is represented as convoking the contemporary British poets, or pretenders to the poetical title, to a session, or rather to a supper. Some of those who present themselves the god rejects with scorn, others he cordially welcomes, others he admits with reserve and admonition.

Moore and Campbell fare the best; Southey and Scott are accepted but with reproof, Coleridge and Wordsworth obidden and dismissed. The criticisms are not more short-sighted than those even of just and able men commonly are on their contemporaries. The bitterness of the 'Lost Leader' feeling to which we have referred accounts for much of Hunt's disparagement of the Lake writers, while in common with all liberals he was prejudiced against Scott as a conspicuous high Tory and friend to kings. But he quite acknowledged the genius, while he condemned the defection, and also what he thought the poetical perversities, of Wordsworth. His treatment of Scott, on the other hand, is idly flippant and patronising. Now it so happened that of the two champions who were soon after to wield, one the bludgeon, and the other the dagger, of Tory criticism in Edinburgh,—I mean Wilson and Lockhart,—Wilson was the cordial friend and admirer of Wordsworth, and Lockhart a man of many hatreds but one great devotion, and that devotion was to Scott. Hence a part at least of the peculiar and as it might seem paradoxical rancour with which the gentle Hunt, and Keats as his friend and supposed follower, were by-and-bye to be persecuted in *Blackwood*.

To go back to the point at which Hunt and Keats first became known to each other. Cowden Clarke began by carrying up to Hunt, who had now moved from the Edgware Road to a cottage in the Vale of Health at Hampstead, a few of Keats's poems in manuscript. Horace Smith was with Hunt when the young poet's work was shown him. Both were eager in its praises, and in questions concerning the person and character of the author. Cowden Clarke at Hunt's request brought Keats to call on him soon afterwards, and has left a

vivid account of their pleasant welcome and conversation. The introduction seems to have taken place early in the spring of 1816¹. Keats immediately afterwards became intimate in the Hampstead household; and for the next year or two Hunt's was the strongest intellectual influence to which he was subject. So far as opinions were concerned, those of Keats had already, as we have seen, been partly formed in boyhood by Leigh Hunt's writings in the *Examiner*. Hunt was a confirmed sceptic as to established creeds, and supplied their place with a private gospel of cheerfulness, or system of sentimental optimism, inspired partly by his own sunny temperament, and partly by the hopeful doctrines of eighteenth-century philosophy in France. Keats shared the natural sympathy of generous youth for Hunt's liberal and optimistic view of things, and he had a mind naturally unapt for dogma :—ready to entertain and appreciate any set of ideas according as his imagination recognised their beauty or power, he could never wed himself to any as representing ultimate truth. In matters of poetic feeling and fancy Keats and Hunt had not a little in common. Both alike were given to 'luxuriating' somewhat effusively and fondly over the 'deliciousness' of whatever they liked in art, books, or nature. To the every-day pleasures of summer and the English fields Hunt brought in a lower degree the same alertness of perception, and acuteness of sensuous and imaginative enjoyment, which in Keats were intense beyond parallel. In his lighter and shallower way Hunt also felt with Keats the uddying charm of classic fable, and was scholar enough to produce about this time some agreeable translations of the Sicilian pastorals, and some, less adequate, of Homer. The poets

¹ See Appendix, p. 222.

Hunt loved best were Ariosto and the other Italian masters of the chivalrous-fanciful epic style; and in English he was devoted to Keats's own favourite Spenser.

The name of Spenser is often coupled with that of 'Libertas,' 'the lov'd Libertas,' meaning Leigh Hunt, in the verses written by Keats at this time. He attempts, in some of these verses, to embody the spirit of the *Faerie Queene* in the metre of *Rimini*, and in others to express in the same form the pleasures of nature as he felt them in straying about the beautiful, then rural Hampstead woods and slopes. In the summer of 1816 he seems to have spent a good deal of his time at the Vale of Health, where a bed was made up for him in the library. In one poem he dilates at length on the associations suggested by the busts and knick-knacks in the room; and the sonnet beginning, 'Keen, fitful gusts are whispering here and there', records pleasantly his musings as he walked home from his friend's house one night in winter. We find him presenting Hunt with a crown of ivy, and receiving a set of sonnets from him in return. Or they would challenge each other to the composition of rival pieces on a chosen theme. Cowden Clarke, in describing one such occasion in December 1816, when they each wrote to time a sonnet *on the Grasshopper and Cricket*, has left us a pleasant picture of their relations:—

"The event of the after scrutiny was one of many such occurrences which have riveted the memory of Leigh Hunt in my affectionate regard and admiration for unaffected generosity and perfectly unpretentious encouragement. His sincere look of pleasure at the first line:—

'The poetry of earth is never dead.'

"Such a prosperous opening!" he said; and when he came to the tenth and eleventh lines:—

‘On a lone winter morning, when the frost
Hath wrought a silence’—

“Ah that’s perfect! Bravo Keats!” And then he went on in a dilatation on the dumbness of Nature during the season’s suspension and torpidity.”

Through Leigh Hunt Keats was before long introduced to a number of congenial spirits. Among them he attached himself especially to one John Hamilton Reynolds, a poetic aspirant who, though a year younger than himself, had preceded him with his first literary venture. Reynolds was born at Shrewsbury, and his father settled afterwards in London, as writing-master at the Blue Coat School. He lacked health and energy, but has left the reputation of a brilliant playful wit, and the evidence of a charming character and no slight literary talent. He held a clerkship in an Insurance office, and lived in Little Britain with his family, including three sisters with whom Keats was also intimate, and the eldest of whom afterwards married Thomas Hood. His earliest poems show him inspired feelingly enough with the new romance and nature sentiment of the time. One, *Safe*, is an indifferent imitation of Byron in his then fashionable Oriental vein: much better work appears in a volume published in the year of Keats’s death, and partly prompted by the writer’s relations with him. In a lighter strain, Reynolds wrote a musical entertainment which was brought out in 1819 at what is now the Lyceum theatre, and about the same time offended Wordsworth with an anticipatory parody of *Peter Bell*, which Byron assumed to be the work of Moore. In 1820 he produced a spirited sketch in prose and verse purporting to relate, under the name *Peter Corcoran*, the fortunes of an amateur of the prize-ring; and a little

later, in conjunction with Hood, the volume of anonymous *Odes and Addresses to Eminent Persons* which Coleridge on its appearance declared confidently to be the work of Lamb. But Reynolds had early given up the hope of living by literature, and accepted the offer of an opening in business as a solicitor. In 1818 he inscribed a farewell sonnet to the Muses in a copy of Shakspeare which he gave to Keats, and in 1821 he writes again,

"As time increases
I give up drawling verse for drawing leases."

In point of fact Reynolds continued for years to contribute to the *London Magazine* and other reviews, and to work occasionally in conjunction with Hood. But neither in literature nor law did he attain a position commensurate with the promise of his youth. Starting level, at the time of which we speak, with men who are now in the first rank of fame,—with Keats and Shelley,—he died in 1852 as Clerk of the County at Newport, Isle of Wight, and it is only in association with Keats that his name will live. Not only was he one of the warmest friends Keats had, entertaining from the first an enthusiastic admiration for his powers, as a sonnet written early in their acquaintance proves¹, but also one of the wisest, and by judicious advice more than once saved him from a mistake. In connection with the name of Reynolds among Keats's associates must be mentioned that of his inseparable friend James Rice, a young solicitor of literary tastes and infinite jest, chronically ailing or worse in health, but always, in Keats's words, "coming on his legs again like a cat"; ever cheerful and

¹ See Appendix, p. 223.

willing in spite of his sufferings, and indefatigable in good offices to those about him: "dear noble generous James Rice," records Dilke,—“the best, and in his quaint way one of the wittiest and wisest men I ever knew.” Besides Reynolds, another and more insignificant rhyming member of Hunt's set, when Keats first joined it, was one Cornelius Webb, remembered now, if remembered at all, by *Blackwood's* derisory quotation of his lines on—

“Keats,
The Muses' son of promise, and what feats
He yet may do”—

as well as by a disparaging allusion in one of Keats's own later letters. He disappeared early from the circle, but not before he had caught enough of its spirit to write sonnets and poetical addresses which might almost be taken for the work of Hunt, or even for that of Keats himself in his weak moments¹. For some years afterwards Webb served as press-reader in the printing-office of Messrs Clowes, being charged especially with the revision of the *Quarterly* proofs. Towards 1830—1840 he re-appeared in literature, as Cornelius ‘Webbe’, author of the *Man about Town* and other volumes of cheerful gossiping Cockney essays, to which the *Quarterly* critics extended a patronizing notice.

An acquaintance more interesting to posterity which Keats made a few months later, at Leigh Hunt's, was that of Shelley, his senior by only three years. During the harrowing period of Shelley's life which followed the suicide of his first wife—when his principle of love a law to itself had in action entailed so dire a consequence,

¹ See particularly the *Invocation to Sleep* in the little volume of Webb's poems published by the Olliers in 1821.

and his obedience to his own morality had brought him into such harsh collision with the world's—the kindness and affection of Leigh Hunt were among his chief consolations. After his marriage with Mary Godwin, he flitted often, alone or with his wife, between Great Marlow and Hampstead, where Keats met him early in the spring of 1817. "Keats," says Hunt, did not take to Shelley as kindly as Shelley did to him, and adds the comment: "Keats, being a little too sensitive on the score of his origin, felt inclined to see in every man of birth a sort of natural enemy." "He was haughty, and had a fierce hatred of rank," says Haydon in his unqualified way. Where his pride had not been aroused by anticipation, Keats had a genius for friendship, but towards Shelley we find him in fact maintaining a tone of reserve, and even of something like moral and intellectual patronage: at first, no doubt, by way of defence against the possibility of social or material patronage on the other's part: but he should soon have learnt better than to apprehend anything of the kind from one whose delicacy, according to all evidence, was as perfect and un mistakeable as his kindness. Of Shelley's kindness Keats had in the sequel sufficient proof: in the meantime, until Shelley went abroad the following year, the two met often at Hunt's without becoming really intimate. Pride and social sensitiveness apart, we can imagine that a full understanding was not easy between them, and that Keats, with his strong vein of every-day humanity, sense, and humour, and his innate openness of mind, may well have been as much repelled as attracted by the unearthly ways and accents of Shelley, his passionate negation of the world's creeds and the world's law, and his intense proselytizing ardour.

It was also at Hunt's house that Keats for the first time met by pre-arrangement, in the beginning of November 1816, the painter Haydon, whose influence soon became hardly second to that of Hunt himself. Haydon was now thirty. He had lately been victorious in one of the two great objects of his ambition, and had achieved a temporary semblance of victory in the other. He had been mainly instrumental in getting the pre-eminence of the Elgin marbles among the works of the sculptor's art acknowledged in the teeth of hostile cliques, and their acquisition for the nation secured. This is Haydon's chief real title to the regard of posterity. His other and life-long, half insane endeavour was to persuade the world to take him at his own estimate, as the man chosen by Providence to add the crown of heroic painting to the other glories of his country. His indomitable high-flaming energy and industry, his strenuous self-reliance, his eloquence, vehemence, and social gifts, the clamour of his self-assertion and of his fierce oppugnancy against the academic powers, even his unabashed claims for support on friends, patrons, and society at large, had won for him much convinced or half-convinced attention and encouragement, both in the world of art and letters and in that of dilettantism and fashion. His first two great pictures, 'Dentatus' and 'Macbeth', had been dubiously received; his last, the 'Judgment of Solomon', with acclamation; he was now busy on one more ambitious than all, 'Christ's Entry into Jerusalem,' and while as usual sunk deep in debt, was perfectly confident of glory. Vain confidence—for he was in truth a man whom nature had endowed, as if maliciously, with one part of the gifts of genius and not the other. Its energy and voluntary

power he possessed completely, and no man has ever lived at a more genuinely exalted pitch of feeling and aspiration. "Never," wrote he about this time, "have I had such irresistible and perpetual urgings of future greatness. I have been like a man with air-balloons under his armpits, and ether in his soul. While I was painting, walking, or thinking, beaming flashes of energy followed and impressed me.... They came over me, and shot across me, and shook me, till I lifted up my heart and thanked God." But for all his sensations and conviction of power, the other half of genius, the half which resides not in energy and will, but in faculties which it is the business of energy and will to apply, was denied to Haydon : its vital gifts of choice and of creation, its magic power of working on the materials offered it by experience, its felicity of touch and insight, were not in him. Except for a stray note here and there, an occasional bold conception, or a touch of craftsmanship caught from greater men, the pictures with which he exultingly laid siege to immortality belong, as posterity has justly felt, to the kingdom not of true heroic art but of rodomontade. Even in drawing from the Elgin marbles, Haydon fails almost wholly to express the beauties which he enthusiastically perceived, and loses every distinction and every subtlety of the original. Very much better is his account of them in words : as indeed Haydon's chief intellectual power was as an observer, and his best instrument the pen. Readers of his journals and correspondence know with what fluent, effective, if often overcharged force and vividness of style he can relate an experience or touch off a character. But in this, the literary, form of expression also, as often as he flies higher, and tries to become imaginative and impressive, we find only the same self-satisfied void tur-

gidity, and proof of a commonplace mind, as in his paintings. Take for instance, in relation to Keats himself, Haydon's profound admonition to him as follows:—"God bless you, my dear Keats! do not despair; collect incident, study character, read Shakspeare, and trust in Providence, and you will do, you must:" or the following precious expansion of an image in one of the poet's sonnets on the Elgin marbles:—"I know not a finer image than the comparison of a poet unable to express his high feelings to a sick eagle looking at the sky, where he must have remembered his former towerings amid the blaze of dazzling sunbeams, in the pure expanse of glittering clouds; now and then passing angels, on heavenly errands, lying at the will of the wind with moveless wings, or pitching downward with a fiery rush, eager and intent on objects of their seeking"—

But it was the gifts and faculties which Haydon possessed, and not those he lacked, it was the ardour and enthusiasm of his temperament, and not his essential commonness of mind and faculty, that impressed his associates as they impressed himself. The most distinguished spirits of the time were among his friends. Some of them, like Wordsworth, held by him always, while his imperious and importunate egotism wore out others after a while. He was justly proud of his industry and strength of purpose: proud also of his religious faith and piety, and in the habit of thanking his maker effusively in set terms for special acts of favour and protection, for this or that happy inspiration in a picture, for deliverance from 'pecuniary emergencies', and the like. "I always rose up from my knees," he says strikingly in a letter to Keats, "with a refreshed fury, an iron-clenched firmness, a crystal piety of feeling that sent me streaming on with

a repulsive power against the troubles of life." And he was prone to hold himself up as a model to his friends in both particulars, lecturing them on faith and conduct while he was living, it might be, on their bounty. Experience of these qualities partly alienated Keats from him in the long run. But at first sight Haydon had much to attract the spirits of ardent youth about him as a leader, and he and Keats were mutually delighted when they met. Each struck fire from the other, and they quickly became close friends and comrades. After an evening of high talk at the beginning of their acquaintance, on the 19th of November, 1816, the young poet wrote to Haydon as follows, joining his name with those of Wordsworth and Leigh Hunt:—

"Last evening wrought me up, and I cannot forbear sending you the following:—

Great spirits now on earth are sojourning:
 He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,
 Who on Helvellyn's summit, wide awake,
 Catches his freshness from Archangel's wing:
 He of the rose, the violet, the spring,
 The social smile, the chain for Freedom's sake,
 And lo! whose steadfastness would never take
 A meaner sound than Raphael's whispering.
 And other spirits there are standing apart
 Upon the forehead of the age to come;
 These, these will give the world another heart,
 And other pulses. Hear ye not the hum
 Of mighty workings in the human mart?
 Listen awhile, ye nations, and be dumb."

Haydon was not unused to compliments of this kind. The three well-known sonnets of Wordsworth had been addressed to him a year or two before; and about the same time as Keats, John Hamilton Reynolds also wrote

him a sonnet of enthusiastic sympathy and admiration. In his reply to Keats he proposed to hand on the above piece to Wordsworth—a proposal which “puts me,” answers Keats, “out of breath—you know with what reverence I would send my well-wishes to him.” Haydon suggested moreover what I cannot but think the needless and regrettable mutilation of the sonnet by leaving out the words after ‘workings’ in the last line but one. The poet, however, accepted the suggestion, and his editors have respected his decision. Two other sonnets, which Keats wrote at this time, after visiting the Elgin marbles with his new friend, are indifferent poetically, but do credit to his sincerity in that he refuses to go into stock raptures on the subject, confessing his inability rightly to grasp or analyse the impressions he had received. By the spring of the following year his intimacy with Haydon was at its height, and we find the painter giving his young friend a standing invitation to his studio in Great Marlborough Street, declaring him dearer than a brother, and praying that their hearts may be buried together.

To complete the group of Keats’s friends in these days, we have to think of two or three others known to him otherwise than through Hunt, and not belonging to the Hunt circle. Among these were the family and friends of a Miss Georgiana Wylie, to whom George Keats was attached. She was the daughter of a navy officer, with wit, sentiment, and an attractive irregular cast of beauty, and Keats on his own account had a great liking for her. On Valentine’s day, 1816, we find him writing, for George to send her, the first draft of the lines beginning, ‘Hadst thou lived in days of old,’ afterwards amplified and published in his first

volume¹. Through the Wylies Keats became acquainted with a certain William Haslam, who was afterwards one of his own and his brothers' best friends, but whose character and person remain indistinct to us; and through Haslam with Joseph Severn, then a very young and struggling student of art. Severn was the son of an engraver, and to the despair of his father had determined to be himself a painter. He had a talent also for music, a strong love of literature, and doubtless something already of that social charm which Mr Ruskin describes in him when they first met five-and-twenty years later at Rome². From the moment of their introduction Severn found in Keats his very ideal of the poetical character realized, and attached himself to him with an admiring affection.

A still younger member of the Keats circle was Charles Wells, afterwards author of *Stories after Nature*, and of that singular and strongly imagined Biblical drama or 'dramatic poem' of *Joseph and his Brethren*, which having fallen dead in its own day has been resuscitated by a group of poets and critics in ours. Wells had been a school companion of Tom Keats at Enfield, and was now living with his family in Featherstone buildings. He has been described by those who knew him as a sturdy, boisterous, blue-eyed and red-headed lad, distinguished in those days chiefly by an irrepressible spirit of fun and mischief. He was only about fifteen when he sent to John Keats the present of roses acknowledged in the sonnet beginning, 'As late I rambled in the happy fields.' A year or two later Keats quarrelled with him for a practical joke played on Tom Keats without due consideration for his state of health; and the

¹ See Appendix, p. 223.

² See *Præterita*, vol. ii. chap. 2.

Stories after Nature, published in 1822, are said to have been written in order to show Keats "that he too could do something."

Thus by his third winter in London our obscurely-born and half-schooled young medical student found himself fairly launched in a world of art, letters, and liberal aspirations, and living in familiar intimacy with some, and friendly acquaintance with others, of the brightest and most ardent spirits of the time. His youth, origin, and temperament alike saved him from anything but a healthy relation of equality with his younger, and deference towards his elder, companions. But the power and the charm of genius were already visibly upon him. Portraits both verbal and other exist in abundance, enabling us to realise his presence and the impression which he made. "The character and expression of his features," it is said, "would arrest even the casual passenger in the street." A small, handsome, ardent-looking youth—the stature little over five feet: the figure compact and well-turned, with the neck thrust eagerly forward, carrying a strong and shapely head set off by thickly clustering gold-brown hair: the features powerful, finished, and mobile: the mouth rich and wide, with an expression at once combative and sensitive in the extreme: the forehead not high, but broad and strong: the eyebrows nobly arched, and eyes hazel-brown, liquid-flashing, visibly inspired—"an eye that had an inward look, perfectly divine, like a Delphian priestess who saw visions." "Keats was the only man I ever met who seemed and looked conscious of a high calling, except Wordsworth." These words are Haydon's, and to the same effect Leigh Hunt:—"the eyes mellow and glowing, large, dark, and sensitive. At the recital of a noble action or a

beautiful thought, they would suffuse with tears, and his mouth trembled." It is noticeable that his friends, whenever they begin to describe his looks, go off in this way to tell of the feelings and the soul that shone through them. To return to Haydon:—"he was in his glory in the fields. The humming of a bee, the sight of a flower, the glitter of the sun, seemed to make his nature tremble; then his eyes flashed, his cheek glowed, and his mouth quivered." In like manner George Keats:—"John's eyes moistened, and his lip quivered, at the relation of any tale of generosity or benevolence or noble daring, or at sights of loveliness or distress;" and a shrewd and honoured survivor of those days, "herself of many poets the frequent theme and valued friend,"—need I name Mrs Procter?—has recorded the impression the same eyes have left upon her, as those of one who had been looking on some glorious sight¹.

In regard to his social qualities, Keats is said, and owns himself, to have been not always perfectly well-conditioned or at his ease in the company of women, but in that of men all accounts agree that he was pleasantness itself: quiet and abstracted or brilliant and voluble by turns, according to his mood and company, but thoroughly amiable and unaffected. If the conversation did not interest him he was apt to draw apart, and sit by himself in the window, peering into vacancy; so that the window-seat came to be recognized as his place. His voice was rich and low, and when he joined in discussion, it was usually with an eager but gentle animation, while his occasional bursts of fiery indignation at wrong or meanness bore no undue air of assumption, and failed not to command respect. His powers of mimicry and dramatic

¹ See Appendix, p. 224.

recital are said to have been great, and never used unkindly.

Thus stamped by nature, and moving in such a circle as we have described, Keats found among those with whom he lived nothing to check, but rather everything to foster, his hourly growing, still diffident and trembling, passion for the poetic life. His guardian, as we have said, of course was adverse: but his brothers, including George, the practical and sensible one of the family, were warmly with him, as his allusions and addresses to them both in prose and verse, and their own many transcripts from his compositions, show. In August 1816 we find him addressing from Margate a sonnet and a poetical Epistle in terms of the utmost affection and confidence to George. About the same time he gave up his lodgings in St Thomas's Street to go and live with his brothers in the Poultry; and in November he composes another sonnet on their fraternal fire-side occupations. Poetry and the love of poetry were at this period in the air. It was a time when even people of business and people of fashion read: a time of literary excitement, expectancy, and discussion, such as England has not known since. In such an atmosphere Keats soon found himself induced to try his fortune and his powers with the rest. The encouragement of his friends was indeed only too ready and enthusiastic. It was Leigh Hunt who first brought him before the world in print, publishing without comment, in the *Examiner* for the 5th of May, 1816, his sonnet beginning, 'O Solitude! if I with thee must dwell,' and on the 1st of December in the same year the sonnet on Chapman's Homer. This Hunt accompanied by some prefatory remarks on the poetical promise of its author,

associating with his name those of Shelley and Reynolds. It was by the praise of Hunt in this paper, says Mr Stephens, that Keats's fate was sealed. But already the still more ardent encouragement of Haydon, if more was wanted, had come to add fuel to the fire. In the Marlborough Street studio, in the Hampstead cottage, in the City lodgings of the three brothers, and in the convivial gatherings of their friends, it was determined that John Keats should put forth a volume of his poems. A sympathetic firm of publishers was found in the Olliers. The volume was printed, and the last proof-sheets were brought one evening to the author amid a jovial company, with the intimation that if a dedication was to be added the copy must be furnished at once. Keats going to one side quickly produced the sonnet *To Leigh Hunt Esqr.*, with its excellent opening and its weak conclusion:—

“Glory and Loveliness have pass'd away;
For if we wander out in early morn,
No wreathèd incense do we see upborne
Into the East to meet the smiling day:
No crowd of nymphs soft-voiced and young and gay,
In woven baskets bringing ears of corn,
Roses and pinks, and violets, to adorn
The shrine of Flora in her early May.
But there are left delights as high as these,
And I shall ever bless my destiny,
That in a time when under pleasant trees
Pan is no longer sought, I feel a free,
A leafy luxury, seeing I could please,
With these poor offerings, a man like thee.”

With this confession of a longing retrospect towards the beauty of the old pagan world, and of gratitude for present friendship, the young poet's first venture was sent forth in the month of March 1817.

CHAPTER III.

The *Poems* of 1817.

THE note of Keats's early volume is accurately struck in the motto from Spenser which he prefixed to it:—

“What more felicity can fall to creature
Than to enjoy delight with liberty?”

The element in which his poetry moves is liberty, the consciousness of release from those conventions and restraints, not inherent in its true nature, by which the art had for the last hundred years been hampered. And the spirit which animates him is essentially the spirit of delight: delight in the beauty of nature and the vividness of sensation, delight in the charm of fable and romance, in the thoughts of friendship and affection, in anticipations of the future, and in the exercise of the art itself which expresses and communicates all these joys.

We have already glanced, in connection with the occasions which gave rise to them, at a few of the miscellaneous boyish pieces in various metres which are included in the volume, as well as at some of the sonnets. The remaining and much the chief portion of the book consists of half a dozen poems in the rhymed decasyllabic

couplet. These had all been written during the period between November 1815 and April 1817, under the combined influence of the older English poets and of Leigh Hunt. The former influence shows itself everywhere in the substance and spirit of the poems, but less, for the present, in their form and style. Keats had by this time thrown off the eighteenth-century stiffness which clung to his earliest efforts, but he had not yet adopted, as he was about to do, a vocabulary and diction of his own full of licences caught from the Elizabethans and from Milton. The chief verbal echoes of Spenser to be found in his first volume are a line quoted from him entire in the epistle to G. F. Mathew, and the use of the archaic 'teen' in the stanzas professedly Spenserian. We can indeed trace Keats's familiarity with Chapman, and especially with one poem of Chapman's, his translation of the Homeric *Hymn to Pan*, in a predilection for a particular form of abstract descriptive substantive:—

"the pillowy silkiness that rests
Full in the speculation of the stars:"—

"Or the quaint mossiness of aged roots:"—

"Ere I can have explored its widenesses."¹

The only other distinguishing marks of Keats's diction in this first volume consist, I think, in the use of the Miltonic 'sphery,' and of an unmeaning coinage of his

¹ Compare Chapman, *Hymn to Pan* :—

"the bright-hair'd god of pastoral,
Who yet is lean and loveless, and doth owe,
By lot, all loftiest mountains crown'd with snow,
All tops of hills, and *cliffy highnesses*,
All sylvan copses, and the fortresses
Of thorniest queaches here and there doth rove,
And sometimes, by allurements of his love,
Will wade the wat'ry softnesses."

own, 'boundly,' with a habit—for which Milton, Spenser, and among the moderns Leigh Hunt all alike furnished him the example—of turning nouns into verbs and verbs into nouns at his convenience. For the rest, Keats writes in the ordinary English of his day, with much more feeling for beauty of language than for correctness, and as yet without any formed or assured poetic style. Single lines and passages declare, indeed, abundantly his vital poetic faculty and instinct. But they are mixed up with much that only illustrates his crudity of taste, and the tendency he at this time shared with Leigh Hunt to mistake the air of chatty, trivial gusto for an air of poetic ease and grace.

In the matter of metre, we can see Keats in these poems making a succession of experiments for varying the regularity of the heroic couplet. In the colloquial *Epistles*, addressed severally to G. F. Mathew, to his brother George, and to Cowden Clarke, he contents himself with the use of frequent disyllabic rhymes, and an occasional *enjambement* or 'overflow.' In the *Specimen of an Induction to a Poem*, and in the fragment of the poem itself, entitled *Calidore* (a name borrowed from the hero of Spenser's sixth book,) as well as in the unnamed piece beginning 'I stood tiptoe upon a little hill,' which opens the volume, he further modifies the measure by shortening now and then the second line of the couplet, with a lyric beat that may have been caught either from Spenser's nuptial odes or Milton's *Lycidas*,—

"Open afresh your round of starry folds,
Ye ardent marigolds."

In *Sleep and Poetry*, which is the most personal and interesting, as well as probably the last-written, poem in the volume, Keats drops this practice, but in other

respects varies the rhythm far more boldly, making free use of the overflow, placing his full pauses at any point in a line rather than at the end, and adopting as a principle rather than an exception the Chaucerian and Elizabethan fashion of breaking the couplet by closing a sentence or paragraph with its first line.

Passing from the form of the poems to their substance, we find that they are experiments or poetic preludes merely, with no pretension to be organic or complete works of art. To rehearse ramblingly the pleasures and aspirations of the poetic life, letting one train of images follow another with no particular plan or sequence, is all that Keats as yet attempts: except in the *Calidore* fragment. And that is on the whole feeble and confused: from the outset the poet loses himself in a maze of young luxuriant imagery: once and again, however, he gets clear, and we have some good lines in an approach to the Dryden manner:—

“Softly the breezes from the forest came,
Softly they blew aside the taper’s flame;
Clear was the song from Philomel’s far bower;
Grateful the incense from the lime-tree flower;
Mysterious, wild, the far-heard trumpet’s tone;
Lovely the moon in ether, all alone.”

To set against this are occasionally expressions in the complete taste of Leigh Hunt, as for instance—

“The lamps that from the high-roof’d wall were pendent,
And gave the steel a shining quite transcendent.”

The *Epistles* are full of cordial tributes to the conjoint pleasures of literature and friendship. In that to Cowden Clarke, Keats acknowledges to his friend that he had been shy at first of addressing verses to him:—

"Nor should I now, but that I've known you long;
 That you first taught me all the sweets of song:
 The grand, the sweet, the terse, the free, the fine,
 What swell'd with pathos, and what right divine:
 Spenserian vowels that elope with ease,
 And float along like birds o'er summer seas;
 Miltonian storms, and more, Miltonian tenderness;
 Michael in arms, and more, meek Eve's fair slenderness.
 Who read for me the sonnet swelling loudly
 Up to its climax, and then dying proudly?
 Who found for me the grandeur of the ode,
 Growing, like Atlas, stronger for its load?
 Who let me taste that more than cordial dram,
 The sharp, the rapier-pointed epigram?
 Show'd me that Epic was of all the king,
 Round, vast, and spanning all like Saturn's ring?"

This is characteristic enough of the quieter and lighter manner of Keats in his early work. Blots like the ungrammatical fourth line are not infrequent with him. The preference for Miltonian tenderness over Miltonian storms may remind the reader of a later poet's more masterly expression of the same sentiment:—"Me rather all that bowery loneliness—". The two lines on Spenser are of interest as conveying one of those incidental criticisms on poetry by a poet, of which no one has left us more or better than Keats. The habit of Spenser to which he here alludes is that of coupling or repeating the same vowels, both in their open and their closed sounds, in the same or successive lines, for example,—

"Eftsoones her shallow ship away did slide,
 More swift than swallow sheres the liquid skye;
 Withouten oare or pilot it to guide,
 Or winged canvas with the wind to fly."

The run here is on *a* and *i*; principally on *i*, which

occurs five times in its open, and ten times in its closed, sound in the four lines,—if we are indeed to reckon as one vowel these two unlike sounds denoted by the same sign. Keats was a close and conscious student of the musical effects of verse, and the practice of Spenser is said to have suggested to him a special theory as to the use and value of the iteration of vowel sounds in poetry. What his theory was we are not clearly told, neither do I think it can easily be discovered from his practice; though every one must feel a great beauty of his verse to be in the richness of the vowel and diphthong sequences. He often spoke of the subject, and once maintained his view against Wordsworth when the latter seemed to be advocating a mechanical principle of vowel variation.

Hear, next how the joys of brotherly affection, of poetry, and of nature, come naively jostling one another in the *Epistle* addressed from the sea-side to his brother George :—

“As to my sonnets, though none else should heed them
I feel delighted, still, that you should read them.
Of late, too, I have had much calm enjoyment,
Stretch'd on the grass at my best loved employment
Of scribbling lines for you. These things I thought
While, in my face, the freshest breeze I caught.
E'en now I am pillow'd on a bed of flowers
That crowns a lofty cliff, which proudly towers
Above the ocean waves. The stalks and blades
Chequer my tablet with their quivering shades.
On one side is a field of drooping oats,
Through which the poppies show their scarlet coats;
So pert and useless that they bring to mind
The scarlet coats that pester human kind.
And on the other side, outspread is seen
Ocean's blue mantle, streak'd with purple and green.

Now 'tis I see a canvass'd ship, and now
Mark the bright silver curling round her brow;
I see the lark down-dropping to his nest,
And the broad wing'd sea-gull never at rest;
For when no more he spreads his feathers free,
His breast is dancing on the restless sea."

It is interesting to watch the newly-awakened literary faculty in Keats thus exercising itself in the narrow circle of personal sensation, and on the description of the objects immediately before his eyes. The effect of rhythmical movement attempted in the last lines, to correspond with the buoyancy and variety of the motions described, has a certain felicity, and the whole passage is touched already with Keats's exquisite perception and enjoyment of external nature. His character as a poet of nature begins, indeed, distinctly to declare itself in this first volume. He differs by it alike from Wordsworth and from Shelley. The instinct of Wordsworth was to interpret all the operations of nature by those of his own strenuous soul; and the imaginative impressions he had received in youth from the scenery of his home, deepened and enriched by continual after meditation, and mingling with all the currents of his adult thought and feeling, constituted for him throughout his life the most vital part alike of patriotism, of philosophy, and of religion. For Shelley on his part natural beauty was in a twofold sense symbolical. In the visible glories of the world his philosophy saw the veil of the unseen, while his philanthropy found in them types and auguries of a better life on earth; and all that imagery of nature's more remote and skyey phenomena, of which no other poet has had an equal mastery, and which comes borne to us along the music of the verse—

"With many a mingled close
Of wild Æolian sound and mountain odour keen"—

was inseparable in his soul from visions of a radiant future and a renovated—alas! not a human—humanity. In Keats the sentiment of nature was simpler than in either of these two other masters; more direct, and so to speak more disinterested. It was his instinct to love and interpret nature more for her own sake, and less for the sake of sympathy which the human mind can read into her with its own workings and aspirations. He had grown up neither like Wordsworth under the spell of lake and mountain, nor in the glow of millennial dreams like Shelley, but London-born and Middlesex-bred, was gifted, we know not whence, as if by some mysterious birthright, with a delighted insight into all the beauties, and sympathy with all the life, of the woods and fields. Evidences of the gift appear, as every reader knows, in the longer poems of his first volume, with their lingering trains of peaceful summer imagery, and loving inventories of 'Nature's gentle doings;' and pleasant touches of the same kind are scattered also among the sonnets; as in that *To Charles Wells*,—

"As late I rambled in the happy fields,
What time the skylark shakes the tremulous dew
From his lush clover covert,"—

or again in that *To Solitude*,—

—"let me thy vigils keep
'Mongst boughs pavilion'd, where the deer's swift leap
Startles the wild bee from the foxglove bell."¹

¹ Compare Wordsworth:—

"Bees that soar for bloom,
High as the highest peak of Furness Fells,
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells."
Is the line of Keats an echo or merely a coincidence?

Such intuitive familiarity with the blithe activities, unnoted by common eyes, which make up the life and magic of nature, is a gift we attribute to men of primitive race and forest nurture; and Mr Matthew Arnold would have us recognize it as peculiarly characteristic of the Celtic element in the English genius and English poetry. It was allied in Keats to another instinct of the early world which we associate especially with the Greeks, the instinct for personifying the powers of nature in clearly-defined imaginary shapes endowed with human beauty and half-human faculties. The classical teaching of the Enfield school had not gone beyond Latin, and neither in boyhood nor afterwards did Keats acquire any Greek: but towards the creations of the Greek mythology he was attracted by an overmastering delight in their beauty, and a natural sympathy with the phase of imagination that engendered them. Especially he shows himself possessed and fancy-bound by the mythology, as well as by the physical enchantment, of the moon. Never was bard in youth so literally moonstruck. He had planned a poem on the ancient story of the loves of Diana, with whom the Greek moon-goddess Selene is identified in the Latin mythology, and the shepherd-prince Endymion; and had begun a sort of prelude to it in the piece that opens 'I stood tiptoe upon a little hill' Afterwards, without abandoning the subject, Keats laid aside this particular exordium, and printed it, as we have seen, as an independent piece at the head of his first volume. It is at the climax of a passage rehearsing the delights of evening that he first bethinks himself of the moon—

"lifting her silver rim
Above a cloud, and with a gradual swim
Coming into the blue with all her light."

The thought of the mythic passion of the moon-goddess for Endymion, and the praises of the poet who first sang it, follow at considerable length. The passage conjuring up the wonders and beneficences of their bridal night is written in part with such a sympathetic touch for the collective feelings and predicaments of men, in the ordinary conditions of human pain and pleasure, health and sickness, as rarely occurs again in Keats's poetry, though his correspondence shows it to have been most natural to his mind :—

"The evening weather was so bright, and clear,
That men of health were of unusual cheer.

The breezes were ethereal, and pure,
And crept through half-closed lattices to cure
The languid sick ; it cool'd their fever'd sleep,
And sooth'd them into slumbers full and deep.
Soon they awoke clear-ey'd : nor burnt with thirsting,
Nor with hot fingers, nor with temples bursting :
And springing up, they met the wond'ring sight
Of their dear friends, nigh foolish with delight ;
Who feel their arms and breasts, and kiss and stare,
And on their placid foreheads part the hair."¹

Finally, Keats abandons and breaks off this tentative exordium of his unwritten poem with the cry :—

"Cynthia ! I cannot tell the greater blisses
That followed thine and thy dear shepherd's kisses :
Was there a poet born ? But now no more
My wandering spirit must no farther soar."

Was there a poet born ? Is the labour and the re-

¹ Mr W. T. Arnold in his *Introduction* (p. xxvii) quotes a parallel passage from Leigh Hunt's *Gentle Armour* as an example of the degree to which Keats was at this time indebted to Hunt : forgetting that the *Gentle Armour* was not written till 1831, and that the debt in this instance is therefore the other way.

ward of poetry really and truly destined to be his! The question is one which recurs in this early volume importunately and in many tones; sometimes with words and cadences closely recalling those of Milton in his boyish *Vacation Exercise*; sometimes with a cry like this, which occurs twice over in the piece called *Sleep and Poetry*,—

“O Poesy! for thee I hold my pen,
That am not yet a glorious denizen
Of thy wide heaven:”—

and anon, with a less wavering, more confident and daring tone of young ambition,—

“But off, Despondence! miserable bane!
They should not know thee, who, athirst to gain
A noble end, are thirsty every hour.
What though I am not wealthy in the dower
Of spanning wisdom: though I do not know
The shiftings of the mighty winds that blow
Hither and thither all the changing thoughts
Of man: though no great ministering reason sorts
Out the dark mysteries of human souls
To clear conceiving: yet there ever rolls
A vast idea before me”—.

The feeling expressed in these last lines, the sense of the overmastering pressure and amplitude of an inspiration as yet unrealized and indistinct, gives way in other passages to confident anticipations of fame, and of the place which he will hold in the affections of posterity.

There is obviously a great immaturity and uncertainty in all these outpourings, an intensity and effervescence of emotion out of proportion as yet both to the intellectual and the voluntary powers, much confusion of idea, and not a little of expression. Yet even in this first book of Keats there is much that the lover

of poetry will always cherish. Literature, indeed, hardly affords another example of work at once so crude and so attractive. Passages that go to pieces under criticism nevertheless have about them a spirit of beauty and of morning, an abounding young vitality and freshness, that exhilarate and charm us whether with the sanction of our judgment or without it. And alike at its best and worst, the work proceeds manifestly from a spontaneous and intense poetic impulse. The matter of these early poems of Keats is as fresh and unconventional as their form, springing directly from the native poignancy of his sensations and abundance of his fancy. That his inexperience should always make the most discreet use of its freedom could not be expected; but with all its immaturity his work has strokes already which suggest comparison with the great names of literature. Who much exceeds him, even from the first, but Shakspeare in momentary felicity of touch for nature, and in that charm of morning freshness who but Chaucer? Already, too, we find him showing signs of that capacity for clear and sane self-knowledge which becomes by-and-by so admirable in him. And he has already begun to meditate to good purpose on the aims and methods of his art. He has grasped and vehemently asserts the principle that poetry should not strive to enforce particular doctrines, that it should not contend in the field of reason, but that its proper organ is the imagination, and its aim the creation of beauty. With reference to the theory and practice of the poetic art the piece called *Sleep and Poetry* contains one passage which has become classically familiar to all readers. Often as it has been quoted elsewhere, it must be quoted again here, as indispensable to the

understanding of the literary atmosphere in which Keats lived :—

“Is there so small a range
In the present strength of manhood, that the high
Imagination cannot freely fly
As she was wont of old? prepare her steeds,
Paw up against the light, and do strange deeds
Upon the clouds? Has she not shown us all?
From the clear space of ether, to the small
Breath of new buds unfolding? From the meaning
Of Jove's large eyebrow, to the tender greening
Of April meadows? here her altar shone,
E'en in this isle; and who could paragon
The fervid choir that lifted up a noise
Of harmony, to where it aye will poise
Its mighty self of convoluting sound,
Huge as a planet, and like that roll round,
Eternally around a dizzy void?
Ay, in those days the Muses were nigh cloy'd
With honours; nor had any other care
Than to sing out and soothe their wavy hair.

Could all this be forgotten? Yes, a schism
Nurtured by foppery and barbarism
Made great Apollo blush for this his land.
Men were thought wise who could not understand
His glories; with a puling infant's force
They sway'd about upon a rocking-horse,
And thought it Pegasus. Ah, dismal-soul'd!
The winds of heaven blew, the ocean roll'd
Its gathering waves—ye felt it not. The blue
Bared its eternal bosom, and the dew
Of summer night collected still to make
The morning precious: Beauty was awake!
Why were ye not awake? But ye were dead
To things ye knew not of,—were closely wed
To musty laws lined out with wretched rule
And compass vile; so that ye taught a school
Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit,
Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit,

Their verses tallied. Easy was the task :
 A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask
 Of Poesy. Ill-fated, impious race !
 That blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face,
 And did not know it,—no, they went about,
 Holding a poor, decrepit standard out,
 Mark'd with most flimsy mottoes, and in large
 The name of one Boileau !

O ye whose charge
 It is to hover round our pleasant hills !
 Whose congregated majesty so fills
 My boundly reverence, that I cannot trace
 Your hallow'd names, in this unholy place,
 So near those common folk ; did not their shames
 Affright you ? Did our old lamenting Thames
 Delight you ? did ye never cluster round
 Delicious Avon, with a mournful sound,
 And weep ! Or did ye wholly bid adieu
 To regions where no more the laurel grew ?
 Or did ye stay to give a welcoming
 To some lone spirits who could proudly sing
 Their youth away, and die ? 'Twas even so.
 But let me think away those times of woe :
 Now 'tis a fairer season ; ye have breathed
 Rich benedictions o'er us ; ye have wreathed
 Fresh garlands : for sweet music has been heard
 In many places ; some has been upstirr'd
 From out its crystal dwelling in a lake,
 By a swan's ebon bill ; from a thick brake,
 Nested and quiet in a valley mild,
 Bubbles a pipe ; fine sounds are floating wild
 About the earth : happy are ye and glad."

Both the strength and the weakness of this are typically characteristic of the time and of the man. The passage is likely to remain for posterity the central expression of the spirit of literary emancipation then militant and about to triumph in England. The two great elder captains of revolution, Coleridge and Words-

worth, have both expounded their cause, in prose, with much more maturity of thought and language; Coleridge in the luminous retrospect of the *Biographia Literaria*, Wordsworth in the austere contentions of his famous prefaces. But neither has left any enunciation of theory having power to thrill the ear and haunt the memory like the rhymes of this young untrained recruit in the cause of poetic liberty and the return to nature. It is easy, indeed, to pick these verses of Keats to shreds, if we choose to fix a prosaic and rational attention on their faults. What is it, for instance, that imagination is asked to do? fly, or drive? Is it she, or her steeds, that are to paw up against the light? and why paw? Deeds to be done upon clouds by pawing can hardly be other than strange. What sort of a verb is 'I green, thou greenest?' Delight with liberty is very well, but liberty in a poet ought not to include liberties with the parts of speech. Why should the hair of the muses require 'soothing'?—if it were their tempers it would be more intelligible. And surely 'foppery' belongs to civilization and not to 'barbarism'; and a standard-bearer may be decrepit, but not a standard, and a standard flimsy, but not a motto. 'Boundly reverence': what is boundly? And so on without end, if we choose to let the mind assume that attitude. Many minds not indifferent to literature were at that time, and some will at all times be, incapable of any other. Such must naturally turn to the work of the eighteenth century school, the school of tact and urbane brilliancy and sedulous execution, and think the only 'blasphemy' was on the side of the youth who could call, or seem to call, the poet of Belinda and the *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* fool and dolt. Byron, in his controversy with Bowles a

year or two later, adopted this mode of attack effectively enough: his spleen against a contemporary finding as usual its most convenient weapon in an enthusiasm, partly real and partly affected, for the genius and the methods of Pope. But controversy apart, if we have in us a touch of instinct for the poetry of imagination and beauty, as distinct from that of taste and reason, however clearly we may see the weak points of a passage like this, however much we may wish that taste and reason had had more to do with it, yet we cannot but feel that Keats touches truly the root of the matter; we cannot but admire the elastic life and variety of his verse, his fine spontaneous and effective turns of rhetoric, the ring and power of his appeal to the elements, and the glow of his delight in the achievements and promise of the new age.

His volume on its appearance by no means made the impression which his friends had hoped for it. Hunt published a thoroughly judicious as well as cordial criticism in the *Examiner*, and several of the provincial papers noticed the book. Haydon wrote in his ranting vein: "I have read your *Sleep and Poetry*—it is a flash of lightning that will rouse men from their occupations, and keep them trembling for the crash of thunder that *will* follow." But people were in fact as far from being disturbed in their occupations as possible. The attention of the reading public was for the moment almost entirely absorbed by men of talent or of genius who played with a more careless, and some of them with a more masterly touch than Keats as yet, on commoner chords of the human spirit; as Moore, Scott, and Byron. In Keats's volume every one could see the faults, while the beauties appealed only to the poetically

mind. It seems to have had a moderate sale at first, but after the first few weeks none at all. The poet, or at all events his brothers for him, were inclined, apparently with little reason, to blame their friends the publishers for the failure. On the 29th of April we find the brothers Ollier replying to a letter of George Keats in dudgeon:—"we regret that your brother ever requested us to publish his book, or that our opinion of its talent should have led us to acquiesce in undertaking it. We are, however, much obliged to you for relieving us from the unpleasant necessity of declining any further connexion with it, which we must have done, as we think the curiosity is satisfied, and the sale has dropped." One of their customers, they go on to say, had a few days ago hurt their feelings as men of business and of taste by calling it "no better than a take in."

A fortnight before the date of this letter Keats had left London. Haydon had been urging on him, not injudiciously, the importance of seclusion and concentration of mind. We find him writing to Reynolds soon after the publication of his volume:—"My brothers are anxious that I should go by myself into the country; they have always been extremely fond of me, and now that Haydon has pointed out how necessary it is that I should be alone to improve myself, they give up the temporary pleasure of living with me continually for a great good which I hope will follow: so I shall soon be out of town." And on the 14th of April he in fact started for the Isle of Wight, intending to devote himself entirely to study, and to make immediately a fresh start upon *Endymion*.

CHAPTER IV.

Excursion to Isle of Wight, Margate, and Canterbury—Summer at Hampstead—New Friends: Dilke: Brown: Bailey—With Bailey at Oxford—Return: Old Friends at Odds—Burford Bridge—Winter at Hampstead—Wordsworth: Lamb: Hazlitt—Poetical Activity—Spring at Teignmouth—Studies and Anxieties—Marriage and Emigration of George Keats. [April, 1817—May, 1818.]

As soon as Keats reached the Isle of Wight, on April 16, 1817, he went to see Shanklin and Carisbrooke, and after some hesitation between the two, decided on a lodging at the latter place. The next day he writes to Reynolds that he has spent the morning arranging the books and prints he had brought with him, adding to the latter one of Shakspeare which he had found in the passage and which had particularly pleased him. He speaks with enthusiasm of the beauties of Shanklin, but in a postscript written the following day, mentions that he has been nervous from want of sleep, and much haunted by the passage in *Lear*, 'Do you not hear the sea?'—adding without farther preface his own famous sea-sonnet beginning—

"It keeps eternal whisperings around
Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell
Gluts twice ten thousand caverns"—.

In the same postscript Keats continues:—

"I find I cannot do without poetry—without eternal

poetry; half the day will not do—the whole of it. I began with a little, but habit has made me a leviathan. I had become all in a tremble from not having written anything of late: the Sonnet overleaf did me good; I slept the better last night for it; this morning, however, I am nearly as bad again....I shall forthwith begin my *Endymion*, which I hope I shall have got some way with before you come, when we will read our verses in a delightful place I have set my heart upon, near the Castle."

The Isle of Wight, however, Keats presently found did not suit him, and Haydon's prescription of solitude proved too trying. He fell into a kind of fever of thought and sleeplessness, which he thought it wisest to try and shake off by flight. Early in May we find him writing to Leigh Hunt from Margate, where he had already stayed the year before, and explaining the reasons of his change of abode. Later in the same letter, endeavouring to measure his own powers against the magnitude of the task to which he has committed himself, he falls into a vein like that which we have seen recurring once and again in his verses during the preceding year, the vein of awed self-questioning, and tragic presentiment uttered half in earnest and half in jest. The next day we find him writing a long and intimate, very characteristic letter to Haydon, signed 'your everlasting friend,' and showing the first signs of the growing influence which Haydon was beginning to exercise over him in antagonism to the influence of Leigh Hunt. Keats was quite shrewd enough to feel for himself after a little while the touches of vanity, fuss, and affectation, the lack of depth and strength, in the kind and charming nature of Hunt, and quite loyal enough to value his excellences none the less, and hold him in grateful and undiminished friendship. But Haydon, between whom and Hunt there was by degrees arising a coolness,

must needs have Keats see things as he saw them. "I love you like my own brother," insists he: "beware, for God's sake, of the delusions and sophistications that are ripping up the talents and morality of our friend! He will go out of the world the victim of his own weakness and the dupe of his own self-delusions, with the contempt of his enemies and the sorrow of his friends, and the cause he undertook to support injured by his own neglect of character." There is a lugubrious irony in these words, when we remember how Haydon, a self-deluder indeed, came to realise at last the very fate he here prophesies for another,—just when Hunt, the harassing and often sordid, ever brightly borne troubles of his earlier life left behind him, was passing surrounded by affection into the haven of a peaceful and bland old age. But for a time, under the pressure of Haydon's masterful exhortations, we find Keats inclining to take an exaggerated and slightly impatient view of the foibles of his earlier friend.

Among other interesting confessions to be found in Keats's letter to Haydon from Margate, is that of the fancy—almost the sense—which often haunted him of dependence on the tutelary genius of Shakspeare:—

"I remember your saying that you had notions of a good genius presiding over you. I have lately had the same thought, for things which I do half at random, are afterwards confirmed by my judgment in a dozen features of propriety. Is it too daring to fancy Shakspeare this presider? When in the Isle of Wight I met with a Shakspeare in the passage of the house at which I lodged. It comes nearer to my idea of him than any I have seen; I was but there a week, yet the old woman made me take it with me, though I went off in a hurry. Do you not think this ominous of good?"

Next he lays his finger on the great secret flaw in his own nature, describing it in words which the after issue

of his life will keep but too vividly and constantly before our minds:—"truth is, I have a horrid Morbidity of Temperament, which has shown itself at intervals; it is, I have no doubt, the greatest Enemy and stumbling-block I have to fear; I may even say, it is likely to be the cause of my disappointment." Was it that, in this seven-months' child of a consumptive mother, some unhealth of mind as well as body was congenital?—or was it that, along with what seems his Celtic intensity of feeling and imagination, he had inherited a special share of that inward gloom which the reverses of their history have stamped, according to some, on the mind of the Celtic race? We cannot tell, but certain it is that along with the spirit of delight, ever creating and multiplying images of beauty and joy, there dwelt in Keats's bosom an almost equally busy and inventive spirit of self-torment.

The fit of dejection which led to the remark above quoted had its immediate cause in apprehensions of money difficulties conveyed to Keats in a letter from his brother George. The trust funds of which Mr Abbey had the disposal for the benefit of the orphans, under the deed executed by Mrs Jennings, amounted approximately to £8,000¹, of which the capital was divisible among them on their coming of age, and the interest was to be applied to their maintenance in the meantime. But the interest of John's share had been insufficient for his professional and other expenses during his term of medical study at Edmonton and London, and much of his capital had been anticipated to meet them; presumably in the form of loans raised on the security of his expectant share. Similar advances had also been for some time necessary to the invalid Tom for his support, and latterly—since he left the

¹ See Appendix, p. 220.

employment of Mr Abbey—to George as well. It is clear that the arrangements for obtaining these advances were made both wastefully and grudgingly. It is further plain that the brothers were very insufficiently informed of the state of their affairs. In the meantime John Keats was already beginning to discount his expectations from literature. Before or about the time of his rupture with the Olliers, he had made the acquaintance of those excellent men, Messrs Taylor and Hessey, who were shortly, as publishers of the *London Magazine*, to gather about them on terms of cordial friendship a group of contributors comprising more than half the choicest spirits of the day. With them, especially with Mr Taylor, who was himself a student and writer of independent, somewhat eccentric ability and research, Keats's relations were excellent from first to last, generous on their part, and affectionate and confidential on his. He had made arrangements with them, apparently before leaving London, for the eventual publication of *Endymion*, and from Margate we find him acknowledging a first payment received in advance. Now and again afterwards he turns to the same friends for help at a pinch, adding once, "I am sure you are confident of my responsibility, and of the sense of squareness that is always in me;" nor did they at any time belie his expectation.

From Margate, where he had already made good progress with *Endymion*, Keats went with his brother Tom to spend some time at Canterbury. Thence they moved early in the summer to lodgings kept by a Mr and Mrs Bentley in Well Walk, Hampstead, where the three brothers had decided to take up their abode together. Here he continued through the summer to work steadily at *Endymion*, being now well advanced

with the second book; and some of his friends, as Haydon, Cowden Clarke, and Severn, remembered all their lives afterwards the occasions when they walked with him on the heath, while he repeated to them, in his rich and tremulous, half-chanting tone, the newly-written passages which best pleased him. From his poetical absorption and Elysian dreams they were accustomed to see him at a touch come back to daily life; sometimes to sympathize heart and soul with their affairs, sometimes in a burst of laughter, nonsense, and puns, (it was a punning age, and the Keats's were a very punning family), sometimes with a sudden flash of his old schoolboy pugnacity and fierceness of righteous indignation. To this summer or the following winter, it is not quite certain which, belongs the well-known story of his thrashing in stand-up fight a stalwart young butcher whom he had found tormenting a cat (a 'ruffian in livery' according to one account, but the butcher version is the best attested).

For the rest, the choice of Hampstead as a place of residence had much to recommend it to Keats: the freshness of the air for the benefit of the invalid Tom: for his own walks and meditations those beauties of heath, field, and wood, interspersed with picturesque embosomed habitations, which his imagination could transmute at will into the landscapes of Arcadia, or into those, 'with high romances blent,' of an earlier England or of fable-land. For society there was the convenient proximity to, and yet seclusion from, London, together with the immediate neighbourhood of one or two intimate friends. Among these, Keats frequented as familiarly as ever the cottage in the Vale of Health where Leigh Hunt was still living—a kind of self-appointed poet-laureate of Hampstead, the features of which he

was for ever celebrating, now in sonnets, and now in the cheerful singsong of his familiar *Epistles* :—

“And yet how can I touch, and not linger awhile
On the spot that has haunted my youth like a smile?
On its fine breathing prospects, its clump-wooded glades,
Dark pines, and white houses, and long-alley'd shades,
With fields going down, where the bard lies and sees
The hills up above him with roofs in the trees.”

Several effusions of this kind, with three sonnets addressed to Keats himself, some translations from the Greek, and a not ungraceful mythological poem, the *Nymphs*, were published early in the following year by Leigh Hunt in a volume called *Foliage*, which helped to draw down on him and his friends the lash of Tory criticism.

Near the foot of the heath, in the opposite direction from Hunt's cottage, lived two new friends of Keats who had been introduced to him by Reynolds, and with whom he was soon to become extremely intimate. These were Charles Wentworth Dilke and Charles Armitage Brown (or plain Charles Brown as he at this time styled himself). Dilke was a young man of twenty-nine, by birth belonging to a younger branch of the Dilkes of Maxstoke Castle, by profession a clerk in the Navy Pay office, and by opinions at this time a firm disciple of Godwin. He soon gave himself up altogether to literary and antiquarian studies, and lived, as every one knows, to be one of the most accomplished and influential of English critics and journalists, and for many years editor and chief owner of the *Athenæum*. No two men could well be more unlike in mind than Dilke and Keats: Dilke positive, bent on certainty, and unable, as Keats says, “to feel he has a personal identity unless he has made up his mind about everything:” while Keats on his part held that “the

only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing—to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts." Nevertheless the two took to each other and became fast friends. Dilke had married young, and built himself, a year or two before Keats knew him, a modest semi-detached house in a good-sized garden near the lower end of Hampstead Heath, at the bottom of what is now John Street; the other part of the same block being built and inhabited by his friend Charles Brown. This Brown was the son of a Scotch stockbroker living in Lambeth. He was born in 1786, and while almost a boy went out to join one of his brothers in a merchant's business at St Petersburg; but the business failing, he returned to England in 1808, and lived as he could for the next few years, until the death of another brother put him in possession of a small competency. He had a taste, and some degree of talent for literature, and held strongly Radical opinions. In 1810 he wrote an opera on a Russian subject, called *Narensky*, which was brought out at the Lyceum with Braham in the principal part; and at intervals during the next twenty years many criticisms, tales, and translations from the Italian, chiefly printed in the various periodicals edited by Leigh Hunt. When Keats first knew him, Brown was a young man already of somewhat middle-aged appearance, stout, bald, and spectacled,—a kindly companion, and jovial, somewhat free liver, with a good measure both of obstinacy and caution lying in reserve, *more Scotico*, under his pleasant and convivial outside. It is clear by his relations with Keats that his heart was warm, and that when once attached, he was capable not only of appreciation but of devotion. After the poet's death Brown went to Italy, and became the

friend of Trelawney, whom he helped with the composition of the *Adventures of a Younger Son*, and of Landor, at whose villa near Florence Lord Houghton first met him in 1832. Two years later he returned to England, and settled at Plymouth, where he continued to occupy himself with literature and journalism, and particularly with his chief work, an essay, ingenious and in part sound, on the autobiographical poems of Shakspeare. Thoughts of Keats, and a wish to be his biographer, never left him, until in 1841 he resolved suddenly to emigrate to New Zealand, and departed leaving his materials in Lord Houghton's hands. A year afterwards he died of apoplexy at the settlement of New Plymouth, now called Taranaki¹.

Yet another friend of Reynolds who in these months attached himself with a warm affection to Keats was Benjamin Bailey, an Oxford undergraduate reading for the Church, afterwards Archdeacon of Colombo. Bailey was a great lover of books, devoted especially to Milton among past and to Wordsworth among present poets. For his earnestness and integrity of character Keats conceived a strong respect, and a hearty liking for his person, and much of what was best in his own nature, and deepest in his mind and cogitations, was called out in the intercourse that ensued between them. In the course of this summer, 1817, Keats had been invited by Shelley to stay with him at Great Marlow, and Hunt, ever anxious that the two young poets should be friends,

¹ The facts and dates relating to Brown in the above paragraph were furnished by his son, still living in New Zealand, to Mr Leslie Stephen, from whom I have them. The point about the *Adventures of a Younger Son* is confirmed by the fact that the mottoes in that work are mostly taken from the Keats MSS. then in Brown's hands, especially *Otho*.

pressed him strongly to accept the invitation. It is said by Medwin, but the statement is not confirmed by other evidence, that Shelley and Keats had set about their respective 'summer tasks,' the composition of *Laon and Cythna* and of *Endymion*, by mutual agreement and in a spirit of friendly rivalry. Keats at any rate declined his brother poet's invitation, in order, as he said, that he might have his own unfettered scope. Later in the same summer, while his brothers were away on a trip to Paris, he accepted an invitation of Bailey to come to Oxford, and stayed there during the last five or six weeks of the Long Vacation. Here he wrote the third book of *Endymion*, working steadily every morning, and composing with great facility his regular average of fifty lines a day. The afternoons they would spend in walking or boating on the Isis, and Bailey has feelingly recorded the pleasantness of their days, and of their discussions on life, literature, and the mysteries of things. He tells of the sweetness of Keats's temper and charm of his conversation, and of the gentleness and respect with which the hot young liberal and free-thinker would listen to his host's exposition of his own orthodox convictions: describes his enthusiasm in quoting Chatterton and in dwelling on passages of Wordsworth's poetry, particularly from the *Tintern Abbey* and the *Ode on Immortality*: and recalls his disquisitions on the harmony of numbers and other technicalities of his art, the power of his thrilling looks and low-voiced recitations, his vividness of inner life, and intensity of quiet enjoyment during their field and river rambles and excursions¹. One special occasion of pleasure was a pilgrimage they made together to Stratford-on-

¹ Houghton MSS.

Avon. From Oxford are some of the letters written by Keats in his happiest vein; to Reynolds and his sister Miss Jane Reynolds, afterwards Mrs Tom Hood; to Haydon; and to his young sister Frances Mary, or Fanny as she was always called (now Mrs Llanos). George Keats, writing to this sister after John's death, speaks of the times "when we lived with our grandmother at Edmonton, and John, Tom, and myself were always devising plans to amuse you, jealous lest you should prefer either of us to the others." Since those times Keats had seen little of her, Mr Abbey having put her to a boarding-school before her grandmother's death, and afterwards taken her into his own house at Walthamstow, where the visits of her poet brother were not encouraged. "He often," writes Bailey, "spoke to me of his sister, who was somehow withholden from him, with great delicacy and tenderness of affection:" and from this time forward we find him maintaining with her a correspondence which shows his character in its most attractive light. He bids her keep all his letters and he will keep hers—"and thus in the course of time we shall each of us have a good bundle—which hereafter, when things may have strangely altered and God knows what happened, we may read over together and look with pleasure on times past—that now are to come." He tells her about Oxford and about his work, and gives her a sketch of the story of *Endymion*—"but I daresay you have read this and all other beautiful tales which have come down to us from the ancient times of that beautiful Greece."

Early in October Keats returned to Hampstead, whence he writes to Bailey noticing with natural indignation the ruffianly first article of the *Cockney School*

series, which had just appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* for that month. In this the special object of attack was Leigh Hunt, but there were allusions to Keats which seemed to indicate that his own turn was coming. What made him more seriously uneasy were signs of discord springing up among his friends, and of attempts on the part of some of them to set him against others. Haydon had now given up his studio in Great Marlborough Street for one in Lisson Grove; and Hunt, having left the Vale of Health, was living close by him at a lodging in the same street. "I know nothing of anything in this part of the world," writes Keats: "everybody seems at loggerheads." And he goes on to say how Hunt and Haydon are on uncomfortable terms, and "live, *pour ainsi dire*, jealous neighbours. Haydon says to me, 'Keats, don't show your lines to Hunt on any account, or he will have done half for you'—so it appears Hunt wishes it to be thought." With more accounts of warnings he had received from common friends that Hunt was not feeling or speaking cordially about *Endymion*. "Now is not all this a most paltry thing to think about?...This is, to be sure, but the vexation of a day, nor would I say so much about it to any but those whom I know to have my welfare and reputation at heart¹." When three months later Keats showed Hunt the first book of his poem in proof, the latter found many faults. It is clear he was to some extent honestly disappointed in the work itself. He may also have been chagrined at not having been taken more fully into confidence during its composition; and what he said to others was probably due partly to such chagrin, partly to nervousness on behalf of his friend's

¹ See Appendix, p. 224.

reputation: for of double-facedness or insincerity in friendship we know by a hundred evidences that Hunt was incapable. Keats, however, after what he had heard, was by no means without excuse when he wrote to his brothers concerning Hunt,—not unkindly, or making much of the matter,—“the fact is, he and Shelley are hurt, and perhaps justly, at my not having showed them the affair officiously; and from several hints I have had, they appear much disposed to dissect and anatomize any trip or slip I may have made. But who’s afraid?” Keats was not the man to let this kind of thing disturb seriously his relations with a friend: and writing about the same time to Bailey, still concerning the dissensions in the circle, he expounds the practical philosophy of friendship with truly admirable good sense and feeling:—

“Things have happened lately of great perplexity; you must have heard of them; Reynolds and Haydon retorting and recriminating, and parting for ever. The same thing has happened between Haydon and Hunt. It is unfortunate: men should bear with each other; there lives not the man who may not be cut up, aye, lashed to pieces, on his weakest side. The best of men have but a portion of good in them—a kind of spiritual yeast in their frames, which creates the ferment of existence—by which a man is propelled to act, and strive, and buffet with circumstance. The sure way, Bailey, is first to know a man’s faults, and then be passive. If after that he insensibly draws you towards him, then you have no power to break the link. Before I felt interested in either Reynolds or Haydon, I was well-read in their faults; yet knowing them both I have been cementing gradually with both. I have an affection for them both, for reasons almost opposite; and to both must I of necessity cling, supported always by the hope that when a little time, a few years, shall have tried me more fully in their esteem, I may be able to bring them together. This time must come, because they

have both hearts; and they will recollect the best parts of each other when this gust is overblown."

Keats had in the meantime been away on another autumn excursion into the country: this time to Burford Bridge near Dorking. Here he passed pleasantly the latter part of November, much absorbed in the study of Shakspeare's minor poems and sonnets, and in the task of finishing *Endymion*. He had thus all but succeeded in carrying out the hope which he had expressed in the opening passage of the poem:—

"Many and many a verse I hope to write,
Before the daisies, vermeil rimm'd and white,
Hide in deep herbage; and ere yet the bees
Hum about globes of clover and sweet peas,
I must be near the middle of my story.
O may no wintry season, bare and hoary,
See it half finished; but let Autumn bold,
With universal tinge of sober gold,
Be all about me when I make an end."

Returning to Hampstead, Keats spent the first part of the winter in comparative rest from literary work. His chief occupation was in revising and seeing *Endymion* through the press, with much help from the publisher, Mr Taylor; varied by occasional essays in dramatic criticism, and as the spring began, by the composition of a number of minor incidental poems. In December he lost the companionship of his brothers, who went to winter in Devonshire for the sake of Tom's health. But in other company he was at this time mixing freely. The convivial gatherings of the young men of his own circle were frequent, the fun high, the discussions on art and literature boisterous, and varied with a moderate, evidently never a very serious,

amount of card-playing, drinking, and dissipation. From these gatherings Keats was indispensable, and more than welcome in the sedate literary circle of his publishers, Messrs Taylor and Hessey, men as strict in conduct and opinion as they were good-hearted. His social relations began, indeed, in the course of this winter to extend themselves more than he much cared about, or thought consistent with proper industry. We find him dining with Horace Smith in company with some fashionable wits, concerning whom he reflects:—"They only served to convince me how superior humour is to wit, in respect to enjoyment. These men say things which make one start, without making one feel; they are all alike; their manners are alike; they all know fashionables; they have all a mannerism in their very eating and drinking, in their mere handling a decanter. They talked of Kean and his low company. 'Would I were with that company instead of yours', said I to myself." Men of ardent and deep natures, whether absorbed in the realities of experience, or in the ideals of art and imagination, are apt to be affected in this way by the conventional social sparkle which is only struck from and only illuminates the surface. Hear, on the other hand, with what pleasure and insight, what sympathy of genius for genius, Keats writes after seeing the great tragedian last mentioned interpret the inner and true passions of the soul:—

"The sensual life of verse springs warm from the lips of Kean.....his tongue must seem to have robbed the Hybla bees and left them honeyless! There is an indescribable *gusto* in his voice, by which we feel that the utterer is thinking of the past and future while speaking of the instant. When he says in Othello, 'Put up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them,' we feel that his throat had commanded where swords were as thick as reeds. From eternal risk, he

speaks as though his body were unassailable. Again, his exclamation of 'blood! blood! blood!' is direful and slaughterous to the last degree; the very words appear stained and gory. His nature hangs over them, making a prophetic repast. The voice is loosed on them, like the wild dogs on the savage relics of an eastern conflict; and we can distinctly hear it 'gorging and growling o'er carcase and limb.' In Richard, 'Be stirring with the lark to-morrow, gentle Norfolk!' came from him, as through the morning atmosphere towards which he yearns."

It was in the Christmas weeks of 1817—18 that Keats undertook the office of theatrical critic for the *Champion* newspaper in place of Reynolds, who was away at Exeter. Early in January he writes to his brothers of the pleasure he has had in seeing their sister, who had been brought to London for the Christmas holidays; and tells them how he has called on and been asked to dine by Wordsworth, whom he had met on the 28th of December at a supper given by Haydon. This is the famous Sunday supper, or 'immortal dinner' as Haydon calls it, which is described at length in one of the most characteristic passages of the painter's *Autobiography*. Besides Wordsworth and Keats and the host, there were present Charles Lamb and Monkhouse. "Wordsworth's fine intonation as he quoted Milton and Virgil, Keats's eager inspired look, Lamb's quaint sparkle of lambent humour, so speeded the stream of conversation," says Haydon, "that I never passed a more delightful time." Later in the evening came in Ritchie the African traveller, just about to start on the journey to Fezzan on which he died, besides a self-invited guest in the person of one Kingston, Comptroller of Stamps, a foolish good-natured gentleman, recommended only by his admiration for Wordsworth. Presently Lamb

getting fuddled, lost patience with the platitudes of Mr Kingston, and began making fun of him, with pranks and personalities which to Haydon appeared hugely funny, but which Keats in his letter to his brothers mentions with less relish, saying, "Lamb got tipsy and blew up Kingston, proceeding so far as to take the candle across the room, hold it to his face, and show us what a soft fellow he was¹." Keats saw Wordsworth often in the next few weeks after their introduction at Haydon's, but has left us no personal impressions of the elder poet, except a passing one of surprise at finding him one day preparing to dine, in a stiff collar and his smartest clothes, with his aforesaid unlucky admirer Mr Comptroller Kingston. We know from other sources that he was once persuaded to recite to Wordsworth the Hymn to Pan from *Endymion*. "A pretty piece of Paganism," remarked Wordsworth, according to his usual encouraging way with a brother poet; and Keats was thought to have winced under the frigidity. Independently of their personal relations, the letters of Keats show that Wordsworth's poetry continued to be much in his thoughts throughout these months; what he has to say of it varying according to the frame of mind in which he writes. In the enthusiastic mood he declares, and within a few days again insists, that there are three things to rejoice at in the present age, "The *Excursion*, Haydon's Pictures, and Hazlitt's depth of Taste." This mention of the name of Hazlitt brings us to another intellectual influence which somewhat powerfully affected Keats at this time. On the liberal side in politics and criticism

¹ See Appendix, p. 225.

there was no more effective or more uncertain free lance than that eloquent and splenetic writer, with his rich, singular, contradictory gifts, his intellect equally acute and fervid, his temperament both enthusiastic and morose, his style at once rich and incisive. The reader acquainted with Hazlitt's manner will easily recognize its influence on Keats in the fragment of stage criticism above quoted. Hazlitt was at this time delivering his course of lectures on the English poets at the Surrey Institution, and Keats was among his regular attendants. With Hazlitt personally, as with Lamb, his intercourse at Haydon's and elsewhere seems to have been frequent and friendly, but not intimate: and Haydon complains that it was only after the death of Keats that he could get Hazlitt to acknowledge his genius.

Of Haydon himself, and of his powers as a painter, we see by the words above quoted that Keats continued to think as highly as ever. He had, as Severn assures us, a keen natural instinct for the arts both of painting and music. Cowden Clarke's piano-playing had been a delight to him at school, and he tells us himself how from a boy he had in his mind's eye visions of pictures:—"when a schoolboy the abstract idea I had of an heroic painting was what I cannot describe. I saw it somewhat sideways, large, prominent, round, and coloured with magnificence—somewhat like the feel I have of Anthony and Cleopatra. Or of Alcibiades leaning on his crimson couch in his galley, his broad shoulders imperceptibly heaving with the sea." In Haydon's pictures Keats continued to see, as the friends and companions of every ardent and persuasive worker in the arts are apt to see, not so much the actual performance, as the idea he had pre conceived of it in the light of his friend's intentions

and enthusiasm. At this time Haydon, who had already made several drawings of Keats's head in order to introduce it in his picture of Christ entering Jerusalem, proposed to make another more finished, "to be engraved," writes Keats, "in the first style, and put at the head of my poem, saying, at the same time, he had never done the thing for any human being, and that it must have considerable effect, as he will put his name to it." Both poet and publisher were delighted with this condescension on the part of the sublime Haydon; who failed, however, to carry out his promise. "My neglect," said Haydon long afterwards, "really gave him a pang, as it now does me."

With Hunt also Keats's intercourse continued frequent, while with Reynolds his intimacy grew daily closer. Both of these friendships had a stimulating influence on his poetic powers. "The Wednesday before last Shelley, Hunt, and I, wrote each a sonnet on the river Nile," he tells his brothers on the 16th of February, 1818. "I have been writing, at intervals, many songs and sonnets, and I long to be at Teignmouth to read them over to you." With the help of Keats's manuscripts or of the transcripts made from them by his friends, it is possible to retrace the actual order of many of these fugitive pieces. On the 16th of January was written the humorous sonnet on Mrs Reynolds's cat; on the 21st, after seeing in Leigh Hunt's possession a lock of hair reputed to be Milton's, the address to that poet beginning 'Chief of organic numbers!'—and on the 22nd the sonnet, 'O golden tongued Romance with serene lute,' in which Keats describes himself as laying aside (apparently) his Spenser, in order to read again the more rousing and human-passionate pages of *Lear*.

On the 31st he sends in a letter to Reynolds the lines to Apollo beginning 'Hence Burgundy, Claret, and Port,' and in the same letter the sonnet beginning 'When I have fears that I may cease to be,' which he calls his last. On the 3rd of February he wrote the spirited lines to Robin Hood, suggested by a set of sonnets by Reynolds on Sherwood Forest; on the 4th, the sonnet beginning 'Time's sea has been five years at its slow ebb,' in which he recalls the memory of an old, otherwise unrecorded love-fancy, and also the well-known sonnet on the Nile, written at Hunt's in competition with that friend and with Shelley; on the 5th, another sonnet postponing compliance for the present with an invitation of Leigh Hunt's to compose something in honour, or in emulation of Spenser; and on the 8th, the sonnet in praise of the colour blue composed by way of protest against one of Reynolds. About the same time Keats agreed with Reynolds that they should each write some metrical tales from Boccaccio, and publish them in a joint volume; and began at once for his own part with *Isabella* or *the Pot of Basil*. A little later in this so prolific month of February we find him rejoicing in the song of the thrush and blackbird, and melted into feelings of indolent pleasure and receptivity under the influence of spring winds and dissolving rain. He theorizes pleasantly in a letter to Reynolds on the virtues and benefits of this state of mind, translating the thrush's music into some blank-verse lines of a singular and haunting melody. In the course of the next fortnight we find him in correspondence with Taylor about the corrections to *Endymion*; and soon afterwards making a clearance of borrowed books, and otherwise preparing to flit. His brother George, who had been

taking care of Tom at Teignmouth since December, was now obliged to come to town, bent on a scheme of marriage and emigration; and Tom's health having made a momentary rally, Keats was unwilling that he should leave Teignmouth, and determined to join him there. He started in the second week of March, and stayed almost two months. It was an unlucky season for weather—the soft-buffeting sheets and misty drifts of Devonshire rain renewing themselves, in the inexhaustible way all lovers of that country know, throughout almost the whole spring, and preventing him from getting more than occasional tantalizing snatches of enjoyment in the beauty of the scenery, the walks, and flowers. His letters are full of objurgations against the climate, conceived in a spirit which seems hardly compatible, in one of his strong family feeling, with the tradition which represents his father to have been a Devonshire man:—

“You may say what you will of Devonshire: the truth is, it is a splashy, rainy, misty, snowy, foggy, haily, floody, muddy, slipshod county. The hills are very beautiful, when you get a sight of 'em; the primroses are out,—but then you are in; the cliffs are of a fine deep colour, but then the clouds are continually vieing with them.”...“I fancy the very air of a deteriorating quality. I fancy the flowers, all precocious, have an Acrasian spell about them; I feel able to beat off the Devonshire waves like soap-froth. I think it well for the honour of Britain, that Julius Caesar did not first land in this county: A Devonshirer, standing on his native hills, is not a distinct object; he does not show against the light; a wolf or two would dispossess him¹.”

Besides his constant occupation in watching and cheering his invalid brother, who had a relapse just after he came down, Keats was busy during these Devonshire days seeing through the press the last sheets

¹ See Appendix, p. 225.

of *Endymion*. He also composed, with the exception of the few verses he had begun at Hampstead, the whole of *Isabella*, the first of his longer poems written with real maturity of art and certainty of touch. At the same time he was reading and appreciating Milton as he had never done before. With the minor poems he had been familiar from a boy, but had not been attracted by *Paradise Lost*, until first Severn, and then more energetically Bailey, had insisted that this was a reproach to him: and he now turned to that poem, and penetrated with the grasp and swiftness of genius, as his marginal criticisms show, into the very essence of its power and beauty. His correspondence with his friends, particularly Bailey and Reynolds, is during this same time unusually sustained and full. It was in all senses manifestly a time with Keats of rapidly maturing power, and in some degree also of threatening gloom. The mysteries of existence and of suffering, and the 'deeps of good and evil,' were beginning for the first time to press habitually on his thoughts. In that beautiful and interesting letter to Reynolds, in which he makes the comparison of human life to a mansion of many apartments, it is his own present state which he thus describes:—

"We no sooner get into the second chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere. We see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight. However, among the effects this breathing is father of, is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of man, of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness, and oppression; whereby this Chamber of Maiden-thought becomes gradually darkened, and at the same time, on all sides of it, many doors are set open—but all dark—all

leading to dark passages. We see not the balance of good and evil; we are in a mist, ~~we~~ we are in that state, we feel the 'Burden of the Mystery.'

A few weeks earlier, addressing to the same friend the last of his rhymed *Epistles*, Keats had thus expressed the mood which came upon him as he sat taking the beauty of the evening on a rock at the sea's edge:—

"twas a quiet eve,
The rocks were silent, the wide sea did weave
An untumultuous fringe of silver foam
Along the flat brown sand; I was at home
And should have been most happy,—but I saw
Too far into the sea, where every maw
The greater or the less feeds evermore:—
But I saw too distinct into the core
Of an eternal fierce destruction,
And so from happiness I far was gone.
Still am I sick of it, and tho' to-day,
I've gathered young spring leaves, and flowers gay
Of periwinkle and wild strawberry,
Still do I that most fierce destruction see,—
The Shark at savage prey,—the Hawk at pounce,—
The gentle Robin, like a Pard or Ounce,
Ravening a worm,—Away, ye horrid moods!
Moods of one's mind!"—

In a like vein, recalling to Bailey a chance saying of his "Why should woman suffer?"—"Aye, why should she?" writes Keats: "'By heavens, I'd coin my very soul, and drop my blood for drachmas.' These things are, and he who feels how incompetent the most skyeey knight-errantry is to heal this bruised fairness, is like a sensitive leaf on the hot hand of thought." And again, "were it in my choice, I would reject a Petrarchal coronation—on account of my dying day, and because women have cancers. I should not by rights

“speak in this tone to you, for it is an incendiary spirit that would do so.”

Not the general tribulations of the race only, but particular private anxieties, were pressing in these days on Keats's thoughts. The shadow of illness, though it had hitherto scarcely touched himself, hung menacingly not only over his brother but his best friends. He speaks of it in a tone of courage and gaiety which his real apprehensions, we can feel, belie. “Banish money”—he had written in Falstaff's vein, at starting for the Isle of Wight a year ago—“Banish sofas—Banish wine—Banish music; but right Jack Health, honest Jack Health, true Jack Health—Banish Health and banish all the world.” Writing now from Teignmouth to Reynolds, who was down during these weeks with rheumatic fever, he complains laughingly, but with an undercurrent of sad foreboding, how he can go nowhere but Sickness is of the company, and says his friends will have to cut that fellow, or he must cut them.

Nearer and more pressing than such apprehensions was the pain of a family break-up now imminent. George Keats had made up his mind to emigrate to America, and embark his capital, or as much of it as he could get possession of, in business there. Besides the wish to push his own fortunes, a main motive of this resolve on George's part was the desire to be in a position as quickly as possible to help, or if need be support, his poet-brother. He persuaded the girl to whom he had long been attached, Miss Wylie, to share his fortunes, and it was settled that they were to be married and sail early in the summer. Keats came up from Teignmouth in May to see the last of his brother, and he and

Tom settled again in their old lodgings in Well Walk. He had a warm affection and regard for his new sister-in-law, and was in so far delighted for George's sake. But at the same time he felt life and its prospects overcast. He writes to Bailey, after his outburst about the sufferings of women, that he is never alone now without rejoicing that there is such a thing as death—without placing his ultimate in the glory of dying for a great human purpose. And after recounting his causes of depression, he recovers himself, and concludes:—"Life must be undergone; and I certainly derive some consolation from the thought of writing one or two more poems before it ceases."

With reference to his poem then just appearing, and the year's work which it represented, Keats was under no illusions whatever. From an early period in its composition he had fully realised its imperfections, and had written: "My ideas of it are very low, and I would write the subject thoroughly again, but I am tired of it, and think the time would be better spent in writing a new romance, which I have in my eye for next summer. Rome was not built in a day, and all the good I expect from my employment this summer is the fruit of experience which I hope to gather in my next poem." The habit of close self-observation and self-criticism is in most natures that possess it allied with vanity and egoism; but it was not so in Keats, who without a shadow of affectation judges himself, both in his strength and weakness, as the most clear-sighted and disinterested friend might judge. He shows himself perfectly aware that in writing *Endymion* he has rather been working off a youthful ferment of the mind than producing a sound or satisfying work of poetry; and

when the time comes to write a preface to the poem, after a first attempt lacking reticence and simplicity, and abandoned at the advice of Reynolds, he in the second quietly and beautifully says of his own work all that can justly be said in its dispraise. He warns the reader to expect "great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished," and adds most unboastfully:—"it is just that this youngster should die away: a sad thought for me, if I had not some hope that while it is dwindling I may be plotting, and fitting myself for verses fit to live."

The apprehensions expressed in these words have not been fulfilled; and *Endymion*, so far from having died away, lives to illustrate the maxim conveyed in its own now proverbial opening line. Immature as the poem truly is in touch and method, superabundant and confused as are the sweets which it offers to the mind, still it is a thing of far too much beauty, or at least of too many beauties, to perish. Every reader must take pleasure in some of its single passages and episodes, while to the student of the poetic art the work is interesting almost as much in its weakness as its strength.

CHAPTER V.

Endymion.

IN the old Grecian world, the myth of Endymion and Selene was one deeply rooted in various shapes in the popular traditions both of Elis in the Peloponnese, and of the Ionian cities about the Latmian gulf in Caria. The central feature of the tale, as originally sung by Sappho, was the nightly descent of the goddess to kiss her lover where he lay spell-bound, by the grace of Zeus, in everlasting sleep and everlasting youth on Mount Latmos. The poem of Sappho is lost, and the story is not told at length in any of our extant classical writings, but only by way of allusion in some of the poets, as Theocritus, Apollonius Rhodius, and Ovid, and of the late prose-writers, as Lucian, Apollodorus, and Pausanias. Of such ancient sources Keats of course knew only what he found in his classical dictionaries. But references to the tale, as every one knows, form part of the stock repertory of classical allusion in modern literature: and several modern writers before Keats had attempted to handle the subject at length. In his own special range of Elizabethan reading, he was probably acquainted with Lyly's court comedy of *Endimion*, in prose, which had been edited, as it happened, by his friend Dilke a few years before: but in it he would have found nothing to his purpose. On the other hand I think he certainly took hints from the *Man in the Moon* of Michael Drayton. In this piece Drayton takes hold of two post-classical

notions concerning the Endymion myth, both in the first instance derived from Lucian,—one that which identifies its hero with the visible ‘man in the moon’ of popular fancy,—the other that which rationalises his story, and explains him away as a personification or mythical representative of early astronomy. These two distinct notions Drayton weaves together into a short tale in rhymed heroics, which he puts into the mouth of a shepherd at a feast of Pan. Like most of his writings, the *Man in the Moon* has strong gleams of poetry and fancy amidst much that is both puerile and pedantic. Critics, so far as I know, have overlooked Keats’s debt to it: but even granting that he may well have got elsewhere, or invented for himself, the notion of introducing his story with a festival in honour of Pan—do not, at any rate, the following lines of Drayton contain evidently the hint for the wanderings on which Keats sends his hero (and for which antiquity affords no warrant) through earth, sea, and air¹ ?—

“Endymion now forsakes
All the delights that shepherds do prefer,
And sets his mind so generally on her
That, all neglected, to the groves and springs
He follows Phœbe, that him safely brings
(As their great queen) unto the nymphish bowers,
Where in clear rivers beautified with flowers
The silver Naidæ bathe them in the bracke.
Sometime with her the sea-horse he doth back
Among the blue Nereides: and when
Weary of waters goddess-like again
She the high mountains actively assays,
And there amongst the light Oriades,
That ride the swift roes, Phœbe doth resort:
Sometime amongst those that with them comport

¹ In the extract I have modernized Drayton’s spelling and

The Hamadriades, doth the woods frequent ;
And there she stays not, but incontinent
Calls down the dragons that her chariot draw,
And with Endymion pleased that she saw,
Mounteth thereon, in twinkling of an eye
Stripping the winds——”

Fletcher again, a writer with whom Keats was very familiar, and whose inspiration, in the idyllic and lyric parts of his work, is closely kindred to his own—Fletcher in the *Faithful Shepherdess* makes Chloe tell, in lines beautifully paraphrased and amplified from Theocritus—

“How the pale Phœbe, hunting in a grove,
First saw the boy Endymion, from whose eyes
She took eternal fire that never dies ;
How she convey’d him softly in a sleep,
His temples bound with poppy, to the steep
Head of old Latmus, where she stoops each night,
Gilding the mountain with her brother’s light,
To kiss her sweetest.”

The subject thus touched by Drayton and Fletcher had been long, as we have seen already, in Keats’s thoughts. Not only had the charm of this old pastoral nature-myth of the Greeks interwoven itself in his being with his natural sensibility to the physical and spiritual spell of moonlight: but deeper and more abstract meanings than its own had gathered about the story in his mind. The divine vision which haunts Endymion in dreams is for Keats symbolical of Beauty itself, and it is the passion of the human soul for beauty which he attempts, more or less consciously, to shadow forth in the quest of the shepherd-prince after his love¹.

endeavoured to mend his punctuation: his grammatical constructions are past mending.

¹ Mrs Owen was, I think, certainly right in her main conception of an allegoric purpose vaguely underlying Keats’s narrative.

The manner in which Keats set about relating the Greek story, as he had thus conceived it, was as far from being a Greek or 'classical' manner as possible. He indeed resembles the Greeks, as we have seen, in his vivid sense of the joyous and multitudinous life of nature: and he loved to follow them in dreaming of the powers of nature as embodied in concrete shapes of supernatural human activity and grace. Moreover, his intuitions for every kind of beauty being admirably swift and true, when he sought to conjure up visions of the classic past, or images from classic fable, he was able to do so often magically well. To this extent Keats may justly be called, as he has been so often called, a Greek, but no farther. The rooted artistic instincts of that race, the instincts which taught them in all the arts alike, during the years when their genius was most itself, to select and simplify, rejecting all beauties but the vital and essential, and paring away their material to the quick that the main masses might stand out unconfused, in just proportions and with outlines rigorously clear—these instincts had neither been implanted in Keats by nature, nor brought home to him by precept and example. Alike by his aims and his gifts, he was in his workmanship essentially 'romantic,' Gothic, English. A general characteristic of his favourite Elizabethan poetry is its prodigality of incidental and superfluous beauties: even in the drama, it takes the powers of a Shakspeare to keep the vital play of character and passion unsmothered by them, and in most narrative poems of the age the quality is quite unchecked. To Keats, at the time when he wrote *Endymion*, such incidental and secondary luxuriance constituted an essential, if not the chief, charm of poetry. "I think poetry," he says, "should surprise by a fine excess:" and with reference

to his own poem during its progress, "it will be a test, a trial of my powers of imagination, and chiefly of my invention—which is a rare thing indeed—by which I must make 4000 lines of one bare circumstance, and fill them with poetry."

The 'one bare circumstance' of the story was in the result expanded through four long books of intricate and flowery narrative, in the course of which the young poet pauses continually to linger or deviate, amplifying every incident into a thousand circumstances, every passion into a world of subtleties. He interweaves with his central Endymion myth whatever others pleased him best, as those of Pan, of Venus and Adonis, of Cybele, of Alpheus and Arethusa, of Glaucus and Scylla, of Circe, of Neptune, and of Bacchus; leading us through labyrinthine transformations, and on endless journeyings by subterranean antres and aerial gulfs and over the floor of ocean. The scenery of the tale, indeed, is often not merely of a Gothic vastness and intricacy; there is something of Oriental bewilderment,—an Arabian Nights jugglery with space and time,—in the vague suddenness with which its changes are effected. Such organic plan as the poem has can best be traced by fixing our attention on the main divisions adopted by the author of his narrative into books, and by keeping hold at the same time, wherever we can, of the thread of allegoric thought and purpose that seems to run loosely through the whole. The first book, then, is entirely introductory, and does no more than set forth the predicament of the love-sick shepherd-prince, its hero; who appears at a festival of his people held in honour of the god Pan, and is afterwards induced by his sister Peona¹

¹ Lempriere (after Pausanias) mentions Pæon as one of the fifty sons of Endymion (in the Elean version of the myth): and

to confide to her the secret of the passion which consumes him. The account of the feast of Pan contains passages which in the quality of direct nature-interpretation are scarcely to be surpassed in poetry:—

“rain-scented eglantine
Gave temperate sweets to that well-wooing sun;
The lark was lost in him; cold springs had run
To warm their chilliest bubbles in the grass;
Man's voice was on the mountains; and the mass
Of nature's lives and wonders puls'd tenfold,
To feel this sun-rise and its glories old.”

What can be more fresh and stirring!—what happier in rhythmical movement!—or what more characteristic of the true instinct by which Keats, in dealing with nature, avoided word-painting and palette-work, leaving all merely visible beauties, the stationary world of colours and forms, as they should be left, to the painter, and dealing, as poetry alone is able to deal, with those delights which are felt and divined rather than seen, with the living activities and operant magic of the earth? Not less excellent is the realisation, in the course of the same episode, of the true spirit of ancient pastoral life and worship; the hymn to Pan in especial both expressing perfectly the meaning of the Greek myth to Greeks, and enriching it with touches of northern feeling that are foreign to, and yet most harmonious with, the original. Keats having got from Drayton, as I surmise, his first notion of an introductory feast of Pan, in his hymn to that divinity borrowed recognizable touches alike from Chapman's Homer's hymn, from the sacrifice to Pan in

in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* there is a *Pæana*—the daughter of the giant Corfiambo in the fourth book. Keats probably had both of these in mind when he gave Endymion a sister and called her *Peona*.

Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals*¹, and from the hymns in Ben Jonson's masque, *Pan's Anniversary*: but borrowed as only genius can, fusing and refashioning whatever he took from other writers in the strong glow of an imagination fed from the living sources of nature:—

“O Thou, whose mighty palace roof doth hang
 From jagged trunks, and overshadoweth
 Eternal whispers, glooms, the birth, life, death
 Of unseen flowers in heavy peacefulness;
 Who lov’st to see the hamadryads dress
 Their ruffled locks where meeting hazels darken;
 And through whole solemn hours dost sit, and hearken
 The dreary melody of bedded reeds—
 In desolate places, where dank moisture breeds
 The pipy hemlock to strange overgrowth;
 Bethinking thee, how melancholy loth
 Thou wast to lose fair Syrinx—do thou now,
 By thy love’s milky brow!
 By all the trembling mazes that she ran,
 Hear us, great Pan!

O Harkener to the loud clapping shears,
 While ever and anon to his shorn peers
 A ram goes bleating: Winder of the horn,
 When snouted wild-boars routing tender corn
 Anger our huntsman: Breather round our farms,
 To keep off mildews, and all weather harms:
 Strange ministrant of undescribed sounds,
 That come a-swooning over hollow grounds,
 And wither drearily on barren moors:
 Dread opener of the mysterious doors
 Leading to universal knowledge—see,
 Great son of Dryope,
 The many that are come to pay their vows
 With leaves about their brows!”

¹ Book 1, Song 4. The point about Browne has been made by Mr W. T. Arnold.

In the subsequent discourse of Endymion and Peona he tells her the story of those celestial visitations which he scarce knows whether he has experienced or dreamed. In Keats's conception of his youthful heroes there is at all times a touch, not the wholesomest, of effeminacy and physical softness, and the influence of passion he is apt to make fever and unman them quite: as indeed a helpless and enslaved submission of all the faculties to love proved, when it came to the trial, to be a weakness of his own nature. He partly knew it, and could not help it: but the consequence is that the love-passages of *Endymion*, notwithstanding the halo of beautiful tremulous imagery that often plays about them, can scarcely be read with pleasure. On the other hand, in matters of subordinate feeling he shows not only a great rhetorical facility, but the signs often of lively dramatic power; as for instance in the remonstrance wherein Peona tries to make her brother ashamed of his weakness:—

“Is this the cause?

This all? Yet it is strange, and sad, alas!
That one who through this middle earth should pass
Most like a sojourning demi-god, and leave
His name upon the harp-string, should achieve
No higher bard than simple maidenhood,
Sighing alone, and fearfully,—how the blood
Left his young cheek; and how he used to stray
He knew not where; and how he would say, *Nay*,
If any said 'twas love: and yet 'twas love;
What could it be but love? How a ring-dove
Let fall a sprig of yew-tree in his path;
And how he died: and then, that love doth scathe
The gentle heart, as Northern blasts do roses.
And then the ballad of his sad life closes
With sighs, and an alas! Endymion!”

In the second book the hero sets out in quest of his felicity, and is led by obscure signs and impulses through a mysterious and all but trackless region of adventure. In the first vague imaginings of youth, conceptions of natural and architectural marvels, unlocalised and half-realised in mysterious space, are apt to fill a large part: and to such imaginings Keats in this book lets himself go without a check. A Naiad, in the disguise of a butterfly, leads Endymion to her spring, and there reveals herself and bids him be of good hope: an airy voice next invites him to descend 'Into the sparry hollows of the world': which done, he gropes his way to a subterranean temple of dim and most un-Grecian magnificence, where he is admitted to the presence of the sleeping Adonis, and whither Venus herself presently repairing gives him encouragement. Thence, urged by the haunting passion within him, he wanders on by dizzy paths and precipices, and forests of leaping, ever-changing fountains. Through all this phantasmagoria engendered by a brain still teeming with the rich first fumes of boyish fancy, and in great part confusing and inappropriate, shine out at intervals strokes of the true old-world poetry admirably felt and expressed:—

"He sinks adown a solitary glen,
Where there was never sound of mortal men,
Saving, perhaps, some snow-light cadences
Melting to silence, when upon the breeze
Some holy bark let forth an anthem sweet
To cheer itself to Delphi:—"

or presences of old religion strongly conceived and realised:—

"Forth from a rugged arch, in the dusk below,
Came mother Cybele—alone—alone—"

In sombre chariot; dark foldings thrown
About her majesty, and front death-pale,
With turrets crowned."

After seeing the vision of Cybele, Endymion, still travelling through the bowels of the earth, is conveyed on an eagle's back down an unfathomable descent, and alighting, presently finds a 'jasmine bower,' whither his celestial mistress again stoops to visit him. Next he encounters the streams, and hears the voices, of Arethusa and Alpheus on their fabled flight to Ortygia: as they disappear down a chasm, he utters a prayer to his goddess in their behalf, and then—

"He turn'd—there was a whelming sound—he slept,
There was a cooler light; and so he kept
Towards it by a sandy path, and lo!
More suddenly than doth a moment go,
The visions of the earth were gone and fled—
He saw the giant sea above his head."

Hitherto Endymion has been wholly absorbed in his own passion and adventures: but now the fates of others claim his sympathy: first those of Alpheus and Arethusa, and next, throughout nearly the whole of the third book, those of Glaucus and Scylla. Keats handles this latter legend with great freedom, omitting its main point, the transformation of Scylla by Circe into a devouring monster, and making the enchantress punish her rival not by this vile metamorphosis, but by death; or rather a trance resembling death, from which after many ages Glaucus is enabled by Endymion's help to rescue her, and together with her the whole sorrowful fellowship of true lovers drowned at sea. From the point in the hero's submarine adventures where he first meets Glaucus,—

"He saw far in the green concave of the sea
An old man sitting calm and peacefully.
Upon a weeded rock this old man sat,
And his white hair was awful, and a mat
Of weeds was cold beneath his cold thin feet"—

—from this passage to the end of the book, in spite of redundance and occasional ugly flaws, Keats brings home his version of the myth with strong and often exquisite effect to the imagination. No picture can well be more vivid than that of Circe pouring the magic phial upon her victims: and no speech much more telling than that with which the detected enchantress turns and scathes her unhappy lover. In the same book the description of the sunk treasures cumbering the ocean-floor challenges comparison, not all unequally, with the famous similar passage in Shakspeare's *Richard III*. In the halls of Neptune Endymion again meets Venus, and receives from her more explicit encouragement than heretofore. Thence Nereids bear him earthward in a trance, during which he reads in spirit words of still more reassuring omen written in starlight on the dark. Since, in his adventure with Glaucus, he has allowed himself to be diverted from his own quest for the sake of relieving the sorrows of others, the hope which before seemed ever to elude him draws at last nearer to fulfilment.

It might seem fanciful to suppose that Keats had really in his mind a meaning such as this, but for the conviction he habitually declares that the pursuit of beauty as an aim in life is only justified when it is accompanied by the idea of devotion to human service. And in his fourth book he leads his hero through a chain of adventures which seem certainly to have a moral and allegorical meaning or none at all. Returning, in that book, to

upper air, Endymion before long half forgets his goddess for the charms of an Indian maiden, the sound of whose lamentations reaches him while he is sacrificing in the forest, and who tells him how she has come wandering in the train of Bacchus from the east. This mysterious Indian maiden proves in fact to be no other than his goddess herself in disguise. But it is long before he discovers this, and in the mean time he is conducted by her side through a bewildering series of aerial ascents, descents, enchanted slumbers and Olympian visions. All these, with his infidelity which is no infidelity after all, his broodings in the Cave of Quietude, his illusions and awakenings, his final farewell to mortality and to Peona, and reunion with his celestial mistress in her own shape, make up a narrative inextricably confused, which only becomes partially intelligible when we take it as a parable of a soul's experience in pursuit of the ideal. Let a soul enamoured of the ideal—such would seem the argument—once suffer itself to forget its goal, and to quench for a time its longings in the real, nevertheless it will be still haunted by that lost vision; amidst all intoxications, disappointment and lassitude will still dog it, until it awakes at last to find that the reality which has thus allured it derives from the ideal its power to charm,—that it is after all but a reflection from the ideal, a phantom of it. What chiefly or alone makes the episode poetically acceptable is the strain of lyric poetry which Keats has put into the mouth of the supposed Indian maiden when she tells her story. His later and more famous lyrics, though they are free from the faults and immaturities which disfigure this, yet do not, to my mind at least, show a command over such various sources of imaginative and musical effect, or touch so thrillingly so many chords

of the spirit. A mood of tender irony and wistful pathos like that of the best Elizabethan love-songs; a sense as keen as Heine's of the immemorial romance of India and the East; a power like that of Coleridge, and perhaps partly caught from him, of evoking the remotest weird and beautiful associations almost with a word; clear visions of Greek beauty and wild wood-notes of Celtic imagination; all these elements come here commingled, yet in a strain perfectly individual. Keats calls the piece a 'roundelay,'—a form which it only so far resembles that its opening measures are repeated at the close. It begins with a tender invocation to sorrow, and then with a first change of movement conjures up the image of a deserted maidenhood beside Indian streams; till suddenly, with another change, comes the irruption of the Asian Bacchus on his march; next follows the detailed picture of the god and of his rout, suggested in part by the famous Titian at the National Gallery; and then, arranged as if for music, the challenge of the maiden to the Maenads and Satyrs, and their choral answers:

“‘Whence came ye, merry Damsels! Whence came ye!
So many, and so many, and such glee?
Why have ye left your bowers desolate,
Your lutes, and gentler fate?’
‘We follow Bacchus, Bacchus on the wing,
A conquering!
Bacchus, young Bacchus! good or ill betide,
We dance before him thorough kingdoms wide:—
Come hither, lady fair, and joined be
To our wild minstrelsy!’

‘Whence came ye, jolly Satyrs! Whence came ye!
So many, and so many, and such glee?
Why have ye left your forest haunts, why left
Your nuts in oak-tree cleft?’—

'For wine, for wine we left our kernel tree;
For wine we left our heath, and yellow brooms,
And cold mushrooms;
For wine we follow Bacchus through the earth;
Great God of breathless cups and chirping mirth!—
Come hither, lady fair, and joined be
To our mad minstrelsy!'"

The strophes recounting the victorious journeys are very unequal; and finally, returning to the opening motive, the lyric ends as it began with an exquisite strain of lovelorn pathos:—

“Come then, sorrow!
Sweetest sorrow!
Like an own babe I nurse thee on my breast:
I thought to leave thee,
And deceive thee,
But now of all the world I love thee best.
There is not one,
No, no, not one
But thee to comfort a poor lonely maid;
Thou art her mother
And her brother,
Her playmate, and her wooer in the shade.”

The high-water-mark of poetry in *Endymion* is thus reached in the two lyrics of the first and fourth book. Of these at least may be said with justice that which Jeffrey was inclined to say of the poem as a whole, that the degree to which any reader appreciates them will furnish as good a test as can be obtained of his having in him “a native relish for poetry, and a genuine sensibility to its intrinsic charm.” In the main body of the work, beauties and faults are so bound up together that a critic may well be struck almost as much by one as by the other. Admirable truth and charm of imagination, exquisite freshness and felicity of touch, mark

such brief passages as we have quoted above: the very soul of poetry breathes in them, and in a hundred others throughout the work: but read farther, and you will in almost every case be brought up by hardly tolerable blemishes of execution and of taste. Thus in the tale told by Glaucus, we find a line of strong poetic vision such as—

“Ææa’s isle was wondering at the moon,”

standing alone in a passage of rambling and ineffective over-honeyed narrative; or again, a couplet forced and vulgar like this both in rhyme and expression—

“I look’d—’twas Scylla! Cursed, cursed Circe!

O vulture-witch, hast never heard of mercy?”

is followed three lines farther on by a masterly touch of imagination and the heart:—

“Cold, O cold indeed

Were her fair limbs, and like a common weed

The sea-swell took her hair.”

One, indeed, of the besetting faults of his earlier poetry Keats has shaken off—his muse is seldom tempted now to echo the familiar sentimental chirp of Hunt’s. But that tendency which he by nature shared with Hunt, the tendency to linger and luxuriate over every imagined pleasure with an over-fond and doting relish, is still strong in him. And to the weaknesses native to his own youth and temperament are joined others derived from an exclusive devotion to the earlier masters of English poetry. The creative impulse of the Elizabethan age, in its waywardness and lack of discipline and discrimination, not less than in its luxuriant strength and freshness, seems actually revived in him. He outdoes even Spenser in his proneness to let Invention ramble

and loiter uncontrolled through what wildernesses she will, with Imagination at her heels to dress if possible in living beauty the wonders that she finds there : and sometimes Imagination is equal to the task and sometimes not : and even busy Invention herself occasionally flags, and is content to grasp at any idle clue the rhyme holds out to her :—

“—a nymph of Dian’s
Wearing a coronal of tender scions” :—
“Does yonder thrush,
Schooling its half-fledged little ones to brush
About the dewy forest, whisper tales?—
Speak not of grief, young stranger, or cold snails
Will slime the rose to-night.”

Chapman especially among Keats’s masters had this trick of letting thought follow the chance dictation of rhyme. Spenser and Chapman—to say nothing of Chatterton—had farther accustomed his ear to experimental and rash dealings with their mother tongue. English was almost as unsettled a language for him as for them ; and he strives to extend its resources, and make them adequate to the range and freshness of his imagery, by the use of compound and other adjectival coinages in Chapman’s spirit—‘far-spooming Ocean’, ‘eye-earnestly’, ‘dead-drifting’, ‘their surly eyes brow-hidden’, ‘nervy knees’, ‘surgy murmurs’—coinages sometimes legitimate or even happy, but often fantastic and tasteless : as well as by sprinkling his nineteenth-century diction with such archaisms as ‘shent’, ‘sith’, and ‘seemlihed’ from Spenser, ‘eterne’ from Spenser and William Browne ; or with arbitrary verbal forms, as ‘to folly’, ‘to monitor’, ‘gordian’d up’, to ‘fragment up’ ; or with neuter verbs used as active, as to ‘travel’

an eye, to 'pace' a team of horses, and *vice versa*. Hence even when in the other qualities of poetry his work is good, in diction and expression it is apt to be lax and wavering, and full of oddities and discords.

In rhythm Keats adheres in *Endymion* to the method he had adopted in *Sleep and Poetry*, deliberately keeping the sentence independent of the metre, putting full pauses anywhere in his lines rather than at the end, and avoiding any regular beat upon the rhyme. Leigh Hunt thought Keats had carried this method too far, even to the negation of metre. Some later critics have supposed the rhythm of *Endymion* to have been influenced by the *Pharonnida* of Chamberlayne: a fourth-rate poet remarkable chiefly for two things, for the inextricable trailing involution of his sentences, exceeding that of the very worst prose of his time, and for a perverse persistency in ending his heroic lines with the lightest syllables—prepositions, adverbs and conjunctions—on which neither pause nor emphasis is possible¹.

But Keats, even where his verse runs most diffusely, rarely fails in delicacy of musical and metrical ear, or in variety and elasticity of sentence structure. There is

¹ The following is a fair and characteristic enough specimen of Chamberlayne:—

"Upon the throne, in such a glorious state
As earth's adored favorites, there sat
The image of a monarch, vested in
The spoils of nature's robes, whose price had been
A diadem's redemption; his large size,
Beyond this pigmy age, did equalize
The admired proportions of those mighty men
Whose cast-up bones, grown modern wonders, when
Found out, are carefully preserved to tell
Posterity how much these times are fell
From nature's youthful strength."

nothing in his treatment of the measure for which precedent may not be found in the work of almost every poet who employed it during the half-century that followed its brilliant revival for the purposes of narrative poetry by Marlowe. At most, he can only be said to make a rule of that which with the older poets was rather an exception; and to seek affinities for him among the tedious by-ways of provincial seventeenth-century verse seems quite superfluous.

As the best criticism on Keats's *Endymion* is in his own preface, so its best defence is in a letter he wrote six months after it was printed. "It is as good," he says, "as I had power to make it by myself." Hunt had warned him against the risks of a long poem, and Shelley against those of hasty publication. From much in his performance that was exuberant and crude the classical training and now ripening taste of Shelley might doubtless have saved him, had he been willing to listen. But he was determined that his poetry should at all times be the true spontaneous expression of his mind. "Had I been nervous," he goes on, "about its being a perfect piece, and with that view asked advice, and trembled over every page, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble. I will write independently. I have written independently *without judgment*. I may write independently and *with judgment* hereafter. The genius of poetry must work out its own salvation in a man. It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself." How well Keats was able to turn the fruits of experience to the benefit of his art, how swift the genius of poetry in him was to work out, as he says, its own salvation, we shall see when we come to consider his next labours.

CHAPTER VI.

Northern Tour—The *Blackwood* and *Quarterly* reviews—Death of Tom Keats—Removal to Wentworth Place—Fanny Brawne—Excursion to Chichester—Absorption in Love and Poetry—Haydon and Money Difficulties—Family Correspondence—Darkening Prospects—Summer at Shanklin and Winchester—Wise Resolutions—Return from Winchester. [June 1818—October, 1819.]

WHILE Keats in the spring of 1818 was still at Teignmouth, with *Endymion* on the eve of publication, he had been wavering between two different plans for the immediate future. One was to go for a summer's walking tour through Scotland with Charles Brown. "I have many reasons," he writes to Reynolds, "for going wonder-ways; to make my winter chair free from spleen; to enlarge my vision; to escape disquisitions on poetry, and Kingston-criticism; to promote digestion and economize shoe-leather. I'll have leather buttons and belt, and if Brown hold his mind, 'over the hills we go.' If my books will keep me to it, then will I take all Europe in turn, and see the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them." A fortnight later we find him inclining to give up this purpose under an over-mastering sense of the inadequacy of his own attainments, and of the necessity of acquiring knowledge, and ever more knowledge, to sustain the flight of poetry:—

"I was proposing to travel over the North this summer. There is but one thing to prevent me. I know nothing—I have read nothing—and I mean to follow Solomon's directions, 'Get learning—get understanding.' I find earlier days are gone by—I find that I can have no enjoyment in the world but continual drinking of knowledge. I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good to the world. Some do it with their society; some with their wit; some with their benevolence; some with a sort of power of conferring pleasure and good-humour on all they meet—and in a thousand ways, all dutiful to the command of great nature. There is but one way for me. The road lies through application, study, and thought. I will pursue it; and, for that end, purpose retiring for some years. I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for philosophy: were I calculated for the former I should be glad; but as I am not, I shall turn all my soul to the latter."

After he had come back to Hampstead in May, however, Keats allowed himself to be persuaded, no doubt partly by considerations of health, and the recollection of his failure to stand the strain of solitary thought a year before, to resume his original intention. It was agreed between him and Brown that they should accompany George Keats and his bride as far as Liverpool, and then start on foot from Lancaster. They left London accordingly on Monday, June 22¹. The coach stopped for dinner the first day at Redbourn near St Albans, where Keats's friend of medical-student days, Mr Stephens, was in practice. He came to shake hands with the travelling party at the poet's request, and many years afterwards wrote an account of the interview, the chief point of which is a description of Mrs George Keats. "Rather short, not what might be strictly called handsome, but looked like a being whom

¹ See Appendix, p. 226.

any man of moderate sensibility might easily love. She had the imaginative poetical cast. Somewhat singular and girlish in her attire.... There was something original about her, and John seemed to regard her as a being whom he delighted to honour, and introduced her with evident satisfaction¹." With no other woman or girl friend was Keats ever on such easy and cordial terms of intimacy as with this 'Nymph of the downward smile and side-long glance' of his early sonnet—'Sister George' as she had now become; and for that reason, and on account of the series of charming playful affectionate letters he wrote to her afterwards in America, the portrait above quoted, such as it is, seems worth preserving.

The farewells at Liverpool over, Keats and Brown went on by coach to Lancaster, and thence began their walk, Keats taking for his reading one book only, the little three-volume edition of Cary's *Dante*. "I cannot," writes Brown, "forget the joy, the rapture of my friend when he suddenly, and for the first time, became sensible to the full effect of mountain scenery. It was just before our descent to the village of Bowness, at a turn of the road, when the lake of Windermere at once came into view....All was enchantment to us both." Keats in his own letters says comparatively little about the scenery, and that quite simply and quietly, not at all with the descriptive enthusiasm of the modern picturesque tourist; nor indeed with so much of that quality as the sedate and fastidious Gray had shown in his itineraries fifty years before. The truth is that an intensely active, intuitive genius for nature like his needs not for its exercise the stimulus of the continued presence of beauty, but on a minimum of experience can summon up and

¹ Houghton MSS.

multiply for itself spirit sunsets, and glories of dream and lake and mountain, richer and more varied than the mere receptive lover of scenery, eager to enjoy but impotent to create, can witness in a life-time of travel and pursuit. Moreover, whatever the effect on him of that first burst of Windermere, it is evident that as Keats proceeded northwards he found the scenery somewhat foreign to his taste. Besides the familiar home beauties of England, two ideals of landscape, classic and mediaeval, haunted and allured his imagination almost equally; that of the sunny and fabled south, and that of the shadowed and adventurous north; and the Scottish border, with its bleak and moorish, rain-swept and cloud-empurpled hills, and its unhomely cold stone villages, struck him at first as answering to neither. "I know not how it is, the clouds, the sky, the houses, all seem anti-Grecian and anti-Charlemagnish."

A change, besides, was coming over Keats's thoughts and feelings whereby scenery altogether was beginning to interest him less, and his fellow-creatures more. In the acuteness of childish and boyish sensation, among the suburban fields or on sea-side holidays, he had unconsciously absorbed images of nature enough for his faculties to work on through a life-time of poetry; and now, in his second chamber of Maiden-thought, the appeal of nature yields in his mind to that of humanity. "Scenery is fine," he had already written from Devonshire in the spring, "but human nature is finer." In the Lake country, after climbing Skiddaw one morning early, and walking to Treby the same afternoon, where they watched with amusement the exercises in a country dancing-school: "There was as fine a row of boys and girls," says Keats, "as you ever saw; some beautiful

faces, and one exquisite mouth. I never felt so near the glory of patriotism, the glory of making, by any means, a country happier. This is what I like better than scenery." The same note recurs frequently in letters of a later date.

From Lancaster the travellers walked first to Ambleside; from Ambleside to the foot of Helvellyn, where they slept, having called by the way on Wordsworth at Rydal, and been disappointed to find him away electioneering. From Helvellyn to Keswick, whence they made the circuit of Derwentwater; Keswick to Treby, Treby to Wigton, and Wigton to Carlisle, where they arrived on the 1st of July. Thence by coach to Dumfries, visiting at the latter place the tomb and house of Burns, to whose memory Keats wrote a sonnet, by no means in his best vein. From Dumfries they started south-westwards for Galloway, a region little frequented even now, and then hardly at all, by tourists. Reaching the Kirkcudbrightshire coast, with its scenery at once wild and soft, its embosomed inlets and rocky tufted headlands, its views over the glimmering Solway to the hazy hills of Man, Brown bethought him that this was Guy Mannering's country, and began to tell Keats about Meg Merrilies. Keats, who according to the fashion of his circle was no enthusiast for Scott's poetry, and of the Waverley novels had read the *Antiquary* but not *Guy Mannering*, was much struck; and presently, writes Brown,—“there was a little spot, close to our pathway. ‘There,’ he said, ‘in that very spot, without a shadow of doubt, has old Meg Merrilies often boiled her kettle.’ It was among pieces of rock, and brambles, and broom, ornamented with a profusion of honeysuckles and roses, and foxgloves, and all in the very blush and

fulness of blossom." As they went along, Keats composed on Scott's theme the spirited ballad beginning 'Old Meg, she was a gipsy,' and stopping to breakfast at Auchencairn, copied it out in a letter which he was writing to his young sister at odd moments, and again in another letter which he began at the same place to Tom. It was his way on his tour, and indeed always, thus to keep by him the letters he was writing, and add scraps to them as the fancy took him. The systematic Brown, on the other hand, wrote regularly and uniformly in the evenings. "He affronts my indolence and luxury," says Keats, "by pulling out of his knapsack, first his paper; secondly his pens; and last, his ink. Now I would not care if he would change a little. I say now, why not take out his pens first sometimes? But I might as well tell a hen to hold up her head before she drinks, instead of afterwards."

From Kirkcudbright they walked on July 5,—skirting the wild moors about the Water of Fleet, and passing where Cairnsmore looks down over wooded slopes to the steaming estuary of the Cree,—as far as Newton Stewart: thence across the Wigtonshire levels by Glenluce to Stranraer and Portpatrick. Here they took the Donaghadee packet for Ireland, with the intention of seeing the Giant's Causeway, but finding the distances and expense exceed their calculation, contented themselves with a walk to Belfast, and crossed again to Portpatrick on the third day. In letters written during and immediately after this excursion, Keats has some striking passages of human observation and reflection:—

"These Kirk-men have done Scotland good. They have made men, women, old men, young men, old women, young women, hags, girls, and infants, all careful; so they are

formed into regular phalanges of savers and gainers.....These Kirk-men have done Scotland harm; they have banished puns, love, and laughing. To remind you of the fate of Burns :— poor, unfortunate fellow! his disposition was Southern! How sad it is when a luxurious imagination is obliged, in self-defence, to deaden its delicacy in vulgarity and in things attainable, that it may not have leisure to go mad after things that are not!.....I would sooner be a wild deer, than a girl under the dominion of the Kirk; and I would sooner be a wild hog, than be the occasion of a poor creature's penance before those execrable elders."

"On our return from Belfast we met a sedan—the Duchess of Dunhill. It was no laughing matter though. Imagine the worst dog-kennel you ever saw, placed upon two poles from a mouldy fencing. In such a wretched thing sat a squalid old woman, squat like an ape half-starved from a scarcity of biscuit in its passage from Madagascar to the Cape, with a pipe in her mouth and looking out with a round-eyed, skinny-lidded inanity, with a sort of horizontal idiotic movement of her head: squat and lean she sat, and puffed out the smoke, while two ragged, tattered girls carried her along. What a thing would be a history of her life and sensations!"—.

From Strauraer the friends made straight for Burns's country, walking along the coast by Ballantrae, Girvan, Kirkoswald, and Maybole, to Ayr, with the lonely mass of Ailsa Crag, and presently the mountains of Arran, looming ever above the Atlantic floor on the left: and here again we find Keats taking a keen pleasure in the mingled richness and wildness of the coast scenery. They went to Kirk Alloway, and he was delighted to find the home of Burns amid scenes so fair. He had made up his mind to write a sonnet in the cottage of that poet's birth, and did so, but was worried by the prate of the man in charge—"a mahogany-faced old jackass who knew Burns: he ought to have been kicked for having spoken to him"—"his gab hindered my sublimity: the

flat dog made me write a flat sonnet." And again, as they journeyed on toward Glasgow he composed with considerable pains (as Brown particularly mentions) the lines beginning 'There is a charm in footing slow across a silent plain.' They were meant to express the temper in which his pilgrimage through the Burns country had been made, but in spite of an occasional striking breadth and concentration of imagery, are on the whole forced and unlike himself.

From Ayr Keats and Brown tramped on to Glasgow, and from Glasgow by Dumbarton through the *Lady of the Lake* country, which they found vexatiously full of tourists, to Inverary, and thence by Loch Awe to Oban. At Inverary Keats was amused and exasperated by a performance of *The Stranger* to an accompaniment of bagpipe music. Bathing in Loch Fyne the next morning, he got horribly bitten by gadflies, and vented his smart in a set of doggerel rhymes. The walk along the shores of Loch Awe impressed him greatly, and for once he writes of it something like a set description, for the benefit of his brother Tom. At the same point occur for the first time complaints, slight at first, of fatigue and discomfort. At the beginning of his tour Keats had written to his sister of its effects upon his sleep and appetite: telling her how he tumbled into bed "so fatigued that when I am asleep you might sew my nose to my great toe and trundle me round the town, like a hoop, without waking me. Then I get so hungry a ham goes but a very little way and fowls are like larks to me...I can eat a bull's head as easily as I used to do bull's eyes." Presently he writes that he is getting used to it, and doing his twenty miles or more a day without inconvenience. But now in the remoter parts of the

Highlands the coarse fare and accommodation, and rough journeys and frequent drenchings, begin to tell upon both him and Brown, and he grumbles at the perpetual diet of oatcake and egga. Arrived at Oban, the friends undertook one journey in especial which proved too much for Keats's strength. Finding the regular tourist route by water to Staffa and Iona too expensive, they were persuaded to take the ferry to the hither side of the island of Mull, and then with a guide cross on foot to the farther side opposite Iona: a wretched walk, as Keats calls it, of some thirty-seven miles over difficult ground and in the very roughest weather. By good luck the sky lifted at the critical moment, and the travellers had a favourable view of Staffa. By the power of the past and its associations in the one 'illustrious island,' and of nature's architecture in the other, Keats shows himself naturally much impressed. Fingal's cave in especial touched his imagination, and on it and its profanation by the race of tourists he wrote, in the seven-syllable metre which no writer since Ben Jonson has handled better or more vigorously, the lines beginning 'Not Aladdin Magian.' Avoiding mere epithet-work and description, like the true poet he is, he begins by calling up for comparison the visions of other fanes or palaces of enchantment, and then, bethinking himself of Milton's cry to Lycidas,

"—where'er thy bones are hurl'd,
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides"—

imagines that lost one to have been found by the divinity of Ocean, and put by him in charge of this cathedral of his building. In his priestly character Lycidas tells his latter-day visitant of the religion of the place, complains of the violation of its solitude, and ends, with a fine abruptness which is the most effective stroke of art in the piece:—

"So for ever I will leave
Such a taint, and soon unweave
All the magic of the place!"¹

So saying, with a spirit's glance
He dived—."

From the exertion and exposure which he underwent on his Scotch tour, and especially in this Mull expedition, are to be traced the first distinct and settled symptoms of failure in Keats's health, and of the development of his hereditary tendency to consumption. In the same letter to his brother Tom which contains the transcript of the Fingal poem, he speaks of a 'slight sore throat,' and of being obliged to rest for a day or two at Oban. Thence they pushed on in bad weather to Fort William, made the ascent of Ben Nevis in a dissolving mist, and so by the 6th of August to Inverness. Keats's throat had in the meantime been getting worse: the ascent, and especially the descent, of Ben Nevis had, as he confesses, tried him: feverish symptoms set in, and the doctor whom he consulted at Inverness thought his condition threatening, and forbade him to continue his tour. Accordingly he took passage on the 8th or 9th of August from the port of Cromarty for London, leaving his companion to pursue his journey alone,—“much lamenting,” to quote Brown's own words, “the loss of his beloved intelligence at my side.” Keats in some degree picked up strength during a nine days' sea passage, the humours of which he afterwards described pleasantly in a letter to his brother George. But his throat trouble, the premonitory sign of worse, never really or for any length of time left him afterwards. On the 18th of

¹ See Appendix, p. 227.

August he arrived at Hampstead, and made his appearance among his friends the next day, "as brown and as shabby as you can imagine," writes Mrs Dilke, "scarcely any shoes left, his jacket all torn at the back, a fur cap, a great plaid, and his knapsack. I cannot tell what he looked like." When he found himself seated, for the first time after his hardships, in a comfortable stuffed chair, we are told how he expressed a comic enjoyment of the sensation, quoting at himself the words in which Quince the carpenter congratulates his gossip the weaver on his metamorphosis¹.

Simultaneously, almost, with Keats's return from the North appeared attacks on him in *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review*. The *Blackwood* article, being No. IV. of a series bearing the signature 'Z' on the 'Cockney School of Poetry,' was printed in the August number of the magazine. The previous articles of the same series, as well as a letter similarly signed, had been directed against Leigh Hunt, in a strain of insult so preposterous as to be obviously inspired by the mere wantonness of partisan licence. It is not quite certain who wrote them, but they were most probably the work either of Lockhart or of Wilson, suggested and perhaps revised by the publisher William Blackwood, at this time his own sole editor. Not content with attacking Hunt's opinions, or his real weaknesses as a writer or a man, his Edinburgh critics must needs heap on him the grossest accusations of vice and infamy. In the course of these articles allusion had several times been made to 'Johnny Keats' as an 'amiable bardling' and puling satellite of the arch-offender and king of Cockaigne, Hunt. When now Keats's own turn came, his treatment

¹ Severn in Houghton MSS.

was mild in comparison with that of his supposed leader. The strictures on his work are idle and offensive, but not more so than is natural to unsympathetic persons full of prejudice and wishing to hurt. 'Cockney' had been in itself a fair enough label for a hostile critic to fasten upon Hunt; neither was it altogether inapplicable to Keats, having regard to the facts of his origin and training: that is if we choose to forget that the measure of a man is not his experience, but the use he is able to make of it. The worst part of the Keats review was in its personalities,—“so back to the shop, Mr John, stick to ‘plasters, pills, ointment boxes,’ &c.”—and what made these worse was the manner in which the materials for them had been obtained. Keats's friend Bailey had by this time taken his degree, and after publishing a friendly notice of *Endymion* in the *Oxford Herald* for June, had left the University and gone to settle in a curacy in Cumberland. In the course of the summer he staid at Stirling, at the house of Bishop Gleig; whose son, afterwards the well-known writer and Chaplain-general to the forces, was his friend, and whose daughter (a previous love-affair with one of the Reynolds sisters having fallen through) he soon afterwards married. Here Bailey met Lockhart, then in the hey-day of his brilliant and bitter youth; lately admitted to the intimacy of Scott; and earning, on the staff of *Blackwood* and otherwise, the reputation and the nickname of ‘Scorpion.’ Bailey, anxious to save Keats from the sort of treatment to which Hunt had already been exposed, took the opportunity of telling Lockhart in a friendly way his circumstances and history, explaining at the same time that his attachment to Leigh Hunt was personal and not political; pleading that he should not be made an object

of party denunciation; and ending with the request that at any rate what had been thus said in confidence should not be used to his disadvantage. To which Lockhart replied that certainly it should not be so used by *him*. Within three weeks the article appeared, making use to all appearance, and to Bailey's great indignation, of the very facts he had thus confidentially communicated.

To the end of his life Bailey remained convinced that whether or not Lockhart himself wrote the piece, he must at any rate have prompted and supplied the materials for it¹. It seems in fact all but certain that he actually wrote it². If so, it was a felon stroke on Lockhart's part, and to forgive him we must needs remember all the gratitude that is his due for his filial allegiance to and his immortal biography of Scott. But even in that connection our grudge against him revives again; since in the party violence of the time and place Scott himself was drawn into encouraging the savage polemics of his young Edinburgh friends; and that he was in some measure privy to the Cockney School outrages seems certain. Such, at least, was the impression prevailing at the time³; and when Severn, who did not know it, years afterwards innocently approached the subject of Keats and his detractors in conversation with Scott at Rome, he observed both in Scott and his daughter signs of pain and confusion

¹ Houghton MSS.

² Dilke (in a MS. note to his copy of Lord Houghton's *Life and Letters*, ed. 1848) states positively that Lockhart afterwards owned as much; and there are tricks of style, *e.g.* the use of the Spanish *Sangrado* for doctor, which seem distinctly to betray his hand.

³ Leigh Hunt at first believed that Scott himself was the writer, and Haydon to the last fancied it was Scott's faithful satellite, the actor Terry.

which he could only interpret in the same sense¹. It is hard to say whether the thought of the great-hearted Scott, the soul most free from jealousy or harshness, thus associated with an act of stupid cruelty to genius, is one to make us the more indignant against those who so misled him, or the more patient of mistakes committed by commoner spirits among the distracting cries and blind collisions of the world.

The *Quarterly* article on *Endymion* followed in the last week of September (in the number dated April), and was in an equally contemptuous strain; the writer professing to have been unable to read beyond the first canto, or to make head or tail of that. In this case again the question of authorship must remain uncertain: but Gifford, as editor, and an editor who never shrank from cutting a contributor's work to his own pattern, must bear the responsibility with posterity. The review is quite in his manner, that of a man insensible to the higher charm of poetry, incapable of judging it except by mechanical rule and precedent, and careless of the pain he gives. Considering the perfect modesty and good judgment with which Keats had in his preface pointed out the weaknesses of his own work, the attacks are both alike inexcusable. They had the effect of promptly rousing the poet's friends in his defence. Reynolds published a warm rejoinder to the *Quarterly* reviewer in a west-country paper, the *Alfred*; an indignant letter on the same side appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* with the initials J. S.—those probably of John Scott, then editor of the *London Magazine*, and soon afterwards killed by a friend of Lockhart's in a duel, arising out of these very Blackwood brawls, in which it was thought that Lockhart himself ought

¹ Severn in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. XI., p. 401.

to have come forward. Leigh Hunt reprinted Reynolds's letter, with some introductory words, in the *Examiner*, and later in his life regretted that he had not done more. But he could not have done more to any purpose. He was not himself an enthusiastic admirer of *Endymion*, and had plainly said so to Keats and to his friends. Reynolds's piece, which he reprinted, was quite effective and to the point; and moreover any formal defence of Keats by Hunt would only have increased the virulence of his enemies, as they both perfectly well knew; folly and spite being always ready to cry out that praise of a friend by a friend must needs be interested or blind.

Neither was Keats's demeanour under the lash such as could make his friends suppose him particularly hurt. Proud in the extreme, he had no irritable vanity; and aiming in his art, if not always steadily, yet always at the highest, he rather despised than courted such success as he saw some of his contemporaries enjoy:—"I hate," he says, "a mawkish popularity." Even in the hopes of permanent fame which he avowedly cherished, there was nothing intemperate or impatient; and he was conscious of perceiving his own shortcomings at least as clearly as his critics. Accordingly he took his treatment at their hands more coolly than older and less sensitive men had taken the like. Hunt had replied indignantly to his Blackwood traducers, repelling scorn with scorn. Hazlitt endeavoured to have the law of them. Keats at the first sting declared, indeed, that he would write no more poetry, but try to do what good he could to the world in some other way. Then quickly recovering himself, he with great dignity and simplicity treated the annoyance as one merely temporary, indifferent, and external. When Mr Hessey sent for his encouragement the extracts

from the papers in which he had been defended, he wrote :—

“I cannot but feel indebted to those gentlemen who have taken my part. As for the rest, I begin to get a little acquainted with my own strength and weakness. Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what ‘Blackwood’ or the ‘Quarterly’ could possibly inflict: and also when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary re-perception and ratification of what is fine.”

And again :—“There have been two letters in my defence in the ‘Chronicle,’ and one in the ‘Examiner,’ copied from the Exeter paper, and written by Reynolds. I don’t know who wrote those in the ‘Chronicle.’ This is a mere matter of the moment: I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death. Even as a matter of present interest, the attempt to crush me in the ‘Quarterly’ has only brought me more into notice, and it is a common expression among book-men, ‘I wonder the ‘Quarterly’ should cut its own throat.’”

In point of fact an unknown admirer from the west country sent Keats about this time a letter and sonnet of sympathy, with which was enclosed a further tribute in the shape of a £25 note. Keats was both pleased and displeased: “if I had refused it,” he says, “I should have behaved in a very braggadocio dunderheaded manner; and yet the present galls me a little.” About the same time he received, through his friend Richard Woodhouse, a young barrister who acted in some sort as literary adviser or assistant to Messrs Taylor and Hessey¹, a glowing letter of sympathy and encouragement from Miss Porter, ‘of Romance celebrity’: by which he shows himself in his reply not more flattered than politeness demands.

¹ See Preface, p. viii.

Keats was really living, during the stress of these *Blackwood* and *Quarterly* storms, under the pressure of another and far more heartfelt trouble. His Hampstead friends, before they heard of his intended return from Scotland, had felt reluctantly bound to write and summon him home on account of the alarming condition of his brother Tom. He had left the invalid behind in their lodgings at Well Walk, and found that he had grown rapidly worse during his absence. In fact the case was desperate, and for the next few months Keats's chief occupation was the harrowing one of watching and ministering to this dying brother. In a letter written in the third week of September, he speaks thus of his feelings and occupations:—"I wish I could say Tom was better. His identity presses upon me so all day that I am obliged to go out—and although I had intended to have given some time to study alone, I am obliged to write and plunge into abstract images to ease myself of his countenance, his voice, and feebleness—so that I live now in a continual fever. It must be poisonous to life, although I feel well. Imagine 'the hateful siege of contraries'—if I think of fame, of poetry, it seems a crime to me, and yet I must do so or suffer." And again about the same time to Reynolds:—"I never was in love, yet the voice and shape of a woman has haunted me these two days—at such a time when the relief, the feverous relief of poetry, seems a much less crime. This morning poetry has conquered—I have relapsed into those abstractions which are my only life—I feel escaped from a new, strange, and threatening sorrow, and I am thankful for it. There is an awful warmth about my heart, like a load of immortality." As the autumn wore on, the task of the watcher grew ever more sorrowful

and absorbing'. On the 29th of October Keats wrote to his brother and sister-in-law in America, warning them, in language of a beautiful tender moderation and sincerity, to be prepared for the worst. For the next month his time was almost wholly taken up by the sickbed, and in the first week of December the end came. "Early one morning," writes Brown, "I was awakened in my bed by a pressure on my hand. It was Keats, who came to tell me that his brother was no more. I said nothing, and we both remained silent for a while, my hand fast locked in his. At length, my thoughts returning from the dead to the living, I said,—'Have nothing more to do with those lodgings,—and alone too! Had you not better live with me?' He paused, pressed my hand warmly, and replied,—'I think it would be better.' From that moment he was my inmate¹."

Brown, as has been said already, had built, and lived in, one part—the smaller eastern part—of the block of two semi-detached houses near the bottom of John Street, Hampstead, to which Dilke, who built and occupied the other part, had given the name of Wentworth Place². The accommodation in Brown's quarters included a front and back sitting-room on the ground floor, with a front and back bedroom over them. The arrangement with Keats was that he should share household expenses, occupying the front sitting-room for the sake of quiet at his work. As soon, relates Brown, as the consolations of nature and friendship had in some measure alleviated his grief, Keats became gradually once more

¹ See Appendix, p. 227. ² Houghton MSS.

³ The house is now known as Lawn Bank, the two blocks having been thrown into one, with certain alterations and additions which in the summer of 1885 were pointed out to me in detail by Mr William Dilke, the then surviving brother of Keats's friend.

absorbed in poetry: his special task being *Hyperion*, at which he had already begun to work before his brother died. But not wholly absorbed; for there was beginning to wind itself about his heart a new spell more powerful than that of poetry itself. It was at this time that the flame caught him, which he had always presciently sought to avoid 'lest it should burn him up.' With his quick self-knowledge he had early realised, not to his satisfaction, his own peculiar mode of feeling towards womankind. Chivalrously and tremulously devoted to his mind's ideal of the sex, he found himself only too critical of the real women that he met, and too ready to perceive or suspect faults in them. Conscious at the same time of the fire of sense and blood within him, he had thought himself partly fortunate in being saved from the entanglements of passion by his sense of this difference between the reality and his ideal. The set of three sonnets in his first volume, beginning 'Woman, when I beheld thee flippant, vain,' had given expression half gracefully, half awkwardly, to this state of mind. Its persistency is affirmed often in his letters.

"I am certain," he wrote to Bailey from Scotland, "I have not a right feeling towards women—at this moment I am striving to be just to them, but I cannot. Is it because they fall so far beneath my boyish imagination? When I was a schoolboy I thought a fair woman a pure goddess; my mind was a soft nest in which some one of them slept, though she knew it not. I have no right to expect more than their reality. I thought them ethereal, above men. I find them perhaps equal—great by comparison is very small.....Is it not extraordinary?—when among men, I have no evil thoughts, no malice, no spleen; I feel free to speak or to be silent; I can listen, and from every one I can learn; my hands are in my pockets, I am free from all suspicion, and comfortable. When I am among women, I have evil thoughts, malice,

spleen ; I cannot speak, or be silent ; I am full of suspicions, and therefore listen to nothing ; I am in a hurry to be gone.... I must absolutely get over this—but how ?”

In a fine passage of a letter to his relatives in America, he alleges this general opinion of women, and with it his absorption in the life, or rather the hundred lives, of imagination, as reasons for hoping that he will never marry :—

“The roaring of the wind is my wife ; and the stars through my window-panes are my children ; the mighty abstract idea of Beauty in all things, I have, stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness. An amiable wife and sweet children I contemplate as part of that Beauty, but I must have a thousand of those beautiful particles to fill up my heart. I feel more and more every day, as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone, but in a thousand worlds. No sooner am I alone, than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me, and serve my spirit the office which is equivalent to a King's Body-guard : “then Tragedy with scepter'd pall comes sweeping by.” According to my state of mind, I am with Achilles shouting in the trenches, or with Theocritus in the vales of Sicily ; or throw my whole being into Troilus, and, repeating those lines, “I wander like a lost soul upon the Stygian bank, staying for waftage,” I melt into the air with a voluptuousness so delicate, that I am content to be alone. These things, combined with the opinion I have formed of the generality of women, who appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a sugar-plum than my time, form a barrier against matrimony that I rejoice in.”

But now Keats's hour was come. Since his return from Scotland, in the midst of his watching by his brother's sick-bed, we have seen him confessing himself haunted already by the shape of a woman. This was a certain Miss Charlotte Cox, a West-Indian cousin of Reynolds's, to whom he did not think the Reynolds sisters

were quite kind. A few days later he writes again how he has been attracted by her rich Eastern look and grace. Very soon, however, the attraction passed, and this 'Charmian' left him fancy-free; but only to find his fate elsewhere. A Mrs Brawne, a widow lady of some little property, with a daughter just grown up and two younger children, had taken Brown's house for the summer while he was away in Scotland. Here the Brawnes had naturally become acquainted with the Dilkes, living next door: the acquaintance was kept up when they moved from Brown's house to one in Downshire Street close by: and it was at the Dilkes' that Keats met Miss Fanny Brawne after his return. Her ways and presence at first irritated and after a little while completely fascinated him. From his first sarcastic account of her written to his brother, as well as from Severn's mention of her likeness to the draped figure in Titian's picture of Sacred and Profane Love, and from the full-length silhouette of her that has been preserved, it is not difficult to realise her aspect and presence. A brisk and blooming, very young beauty, of the far from uncommon English hawk blonde type, with aquiline nose and retreating forehead, sharp-cut nostril and gray-blue eye, a slight, shapely figure rather short than tall, a taking smile, and good hair, carriage and complexion,—such was Fanny Brawne externally, but of her character we have little means of judging. She was certainly high-spirited, inexperienced, and self-confident: as certainly, though kind and constant to her lover in spite of prospects that before long grew dark, she did not fully realise what manner of man he was. Both his men and women friends, without thinking unkindly of her, were apparently of one opinion in

holding her no mate for him either in heart or mind, and in regarding the attachment as unlucky.

So it assuredly was: so probably under the circumstances must any passion for a woman have been. Stroke on stroke of untoward fortune had in truth begun to fall on Keats, as if in fulfilment of the constitutional misgivings of his darker moods. First the departure of his brother George had deprived him of his chief friend, to whom almost alone he had from boyhood been accustomed to turn for relief in hours of despondency. Next the exertions of his Scotch tour had over-taxed his strength, and unchained, though as yet he knew it not, the deadly hereditary enemy in his blood. Coming back, he had found the grasp of that enemy closed inexorably upon his brother Tom, and in nursing him had lived in spirit through all his pains. At the same time the gibes of the reviewers, little as they might touch his inner self, came to teach him the harshness and carelessness of the world's judgments, and the precariousness of his practical hopes from literature. Last were added the pangs of love—love requited indeed, but having no near or sure prospect of fruition: and even love disdained might have made him suffer less. The passion wrought fiercely in his already fevered blood; its alternations of doubt and torment and tantalising rapture sapped his powers, and redoubled every strain to which bereavement, shaken health, and anticipations of poverty, exposed them. Within a year the combined assault proved too much for his strength, and he broke down. But in the meantime he showed a brave face to the world, and while anxiety gnawed and passion wasted him, was able to throw himself into the labours of his art with a fruitful, if a fitful, energy. During the first few weeks

of winter following his brother's death, he wrote indeed, as he tells Haydon, "only a little now and then: but nothing to speak of—being discontented and as it were moulting." Yet such work as Keats did at this time was done at the very height of his powers, and included parts both of *Hyperion* and *The Eve of St Agnes*.

Within a month of the date of the above extract the latter piece was finished, having been written out during a visit which Keats and Brown paid in Sussex in the latter part of January (1819). They stayed for a few days with the father of their friend Dilke in Chichester, and for nearly a fortnight with his sister and brother-in-law, the Snooks, at Bedhampton close by. Keats liked his hosts and received pleasure from his visit; but his health kept him much indoors, his only outings being to 'a couple of dowager card-parties,' and to a gathering of country clergy on a wet day, at the consecration of a chapel for converted Jews. The latter ceremony jarred on his nerves, and caused him to write afterwards to his brother an entertaining splenetic diatribe on the clerical character and physiognomy. During his stay at Chichester he also seems to have begun, or at any rate conceived, the poem on the *Eve of St Mark*, which he never finished, and which remains so interesting a pre-Raphaelite fragment in his work.

Returning at the beginning of February, Keats resumed his life at Hampstead under Brown's roof. He saw much less society than the winter before, the state of his throat compelling him, for one thing, generally to avoid the night air. But the chief cause of his seclusion was no doubt the passion which was beginning to engross him, and to deaden his interest in the other relations of life. The stages by which it grew on him we cannot

follow. His own account of the matter to Fanny Brawne was that he had written himself her vassal within a week of their first meeting. His real first feeling for her, as we can see by his letters written at the time, had been one, the most perilous indeed to peace of mind, of strong mixed attraction and aversion. He might seem to have got no farther by the 14th of February, when he writes to his brother and sister-in-law in America, "Miss Brawne and I have every now and then a chat and a tiff;" but this is rather to be taken as an instance of his extreme general reticence on the subject, and it is probable that by this time, if not sooner, the attachment was in fact avowed and the engagement made. The secret violence of Keats's passion, and the restless physical jealousy which accompanied it, betray themselves in the verses addressed *To Fanny*, which belong apparently to this date. They are written very unequally, but with his true and brilliant felicity of touch here and there. The occasion is the presence of his mistress at some dance :—

"Who now with greedy looks, eats up my feast,
What stare outfaces now my silver moon?
Ah! keep that hand unravished at the least;
Let, let the amorous burn—
But, prythee, do not turn
The current of your heart from me so soon,
O! save, in charity,
The quickest pulse for me.
Save it for me, sweet love! though music breathe
Voluptuous visions into the warm air,
Though swimming through the dance's dangerous wreath;
Be like an April day,
Smiling and cold and gay,
A temperate lily, temperate as fair;
Then, Heaven! there will be
A warmer June for me."

If Keats thus found in verse occasional relief from the violence of his feelings, he sought for none in his correspondence either with his brother or his friends. Except in the lightest passing allusion, he makes no direct mention of Miss Brawne in his letters; partly, no doubt, from mere excess of sensitiveness, dreading to profane his treasure; partly because he knew, and could not bear the thought, that both his friends and hers, in so far as they guessed the attachment, looked on it unfavourably. Brown after a little while could hardly help being in the secret, inasmuch as when the Dilkes left Hampstead in April, and went to live at Westminster, the Brawnes again took their house; so that Keats and Brown thenceforth had the young lady and her family for next-door neighbours. Dilke himself, but apparently not till many months later, writes, "It is quite a settled thing between John Keats and Miss Brawne, God help them. It's a bad thing for them. The mother says she cannot prevent it, and her only hope is that it will go off. He don't like any one to look at her or speak to her." Other friends, including one so intimate and so affectionate as Severn, never realised until Keats was on his death-bed that there had been an engagement, or that his relations with Miss Brawne had been other than those of ordinary intimacy between neighbours.

Intense and jealous as Keats's newly awakened passion was, it seemed at first to stimulate rather than distract him in the exercise of his now ripened poetic gift. The spring of this year 1819 seems to repeat in a richer key the history of the last; fits of inspiration succeeding to fits of lassitude, and growing more frequent as the season advanced. Between the beginning of February

and the beginning of June he wrote many of his best shorter poems, including apparently all except one of his six famous odes. About the middle of February he speaks of having taken a stroll among the marbles of the British Museum, and the ode *On Indolence* and the ode *On a Grecian Urn*, written two or three months later, show how the charm of ancient sculpture was at this time working in his mind. The fit of morning idleness which helped to inspire the former piece is recorded in his correspondence under the date of March 19. The lines beginning 'Bards of passion and of mirth,' are dated the 26th of the same month. On the 15th of April he sends off to his brother, as the last poem he has written, the ode *To Psyche*, only less perfect and felicitous than that *On a Grecian Urn*. About a week later the nightingale would be beginning to sing. Presently it appeared that one had built her nest in Brown's garden, near his house.

"Keats," writes Brown, "felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast-table to the grass-plot under a plum, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of our nightingale. The writing was not well legible; and it was difficult to arrange the stanzas on so many scraps. With his assistance I succeeded, and this was his *Ode to a Nightingale*. ...Immediately afterwards I searched for more of his (in reality) fugitive pieces, in which task, at my request, he again assisted me....From that day he gave me permission to copy any verses he might write, and I fully availed myself of it. He cared so little for them himself, when once, as it appeared to me, his imagination was released from their influence, that he required a friend at hand to preserve them."

The above account perfectly agrees with what Keats

had written towards the end of the summer before :—
 “I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beautiful, even if my night’s labours should be burnt every morning, and no eye ever rest upon them.” And yet for these odes Keats seems to have had a partiality : with that to *Psyche*, he tells his brother, he has taken more pains than with anything he had ever written before ; and Haydon has told how thrillingly, ‘in his low tremulous under-tone,’ he recited to him that to the nightingale as they walked one day in the Kilburn meadows.

During the winter and spring while his faculties were thus absorbed between love and poetry, Keats had suffered his correspondence to flag, except only with Haydon, with his young sister Fanny, and with his brother and sister-in-law in America. About Christmas Haydon, whose work had been interrupted by a weakness of the eyes, and whose borrowing powers were for the time being exhausted, had turned in his difficulties to Keats of all men. With his usual generosity Keats had promised, only asking him to try the rich lovers of art first, that if the worst came to the worst he would help him with all he had. Haydon in a few weeks returns to the charge :—“My dear Keats—now I feel the want of your promised assistance....Before the 20th if you could help me it would be nectar and manna and all the blessings of gratified thirst.” Keats had intended for Haydon’s relief some of the money due to him from his brother Tom’s share in their grandmother’s gift ; which he expected his guardian to make over to him at once on his application. But difficulties of all sorts were raised, and after much correspondence, attendance in bankers’ and solicitors’ offices, and other ordeals harassing to the poetic

mind, he had the annoyance of finding himself unable to do as he had hoped. When by-and-by Haydon writes, in the true borrower's vein, reproaching him with his promise and his failure to keep it, Keats replies with perfect temper, explaining that he had supposed himself to have the necessary means in his hand, but has been baffled by unforeseen difficulties in getting possession of his money. Moreover he finds that even if all he had were laid on the table, the intended loan would leave him barely enough to live on for two years.¹ Incidentally he mentions that he has already lent sums to various friends amounting in all to near £200, of which he expects the repayment late if ever. The upshot of the matter was that Keats contrived somehow to lend Haydon thirty pounds. Three months later a law-suit threatened by the widow of Captain Jennings against Mr Abbey, in connection with the administration of the trust, had the effect for a time of stopping his supplies from that quarter altogether. Thereupon he very gently asks Haydon to make an effort to repay his loan; who not only made none—"he did not," says Keats, "seem to care much about it, but let me go without my money almost with nonchalance." This was too much even for Keats's patience. He declares that he shall never count Haydon a friend again: nevertheless he by-and-by let old affection resume its sway, and entered into the other's interests and endured his exhortations as kindly as ever.

To his young sister Keats's letters during the same period are full of playful brotherly tenderness and careful advice; of regrets that she is kept so much from him by the scruples of Mr and Mrs Abbey; and of plans for

¹ See Appendix, p. 227.

coming over to see her at Walthamstow when the weather and his throat allow. He thinks of various little presents to please her,—a selection of Tassie's pretty, and then popular, paste imitations of ancient gems,—flowers,—drawing materials,—

"anything but live stock. Though I will not now be very severe on it, remembering how fond I used to be of Goldfinches, Tomtits, Minnows, Mice, Ticklebacks, Dace, Cock Salmons and all the whole tribe of the Bushes and the Brooks: but verily they are better in the trees and the water,—though I must confess even now a partiality for a handsome globe of gold-fish—then I would have it hold ten pails of water and be fed continually fresh through a cool pipe with another pipe to let through the floor—well ventilated they would preserve all their beautiful silver and crimson. Then I would put it before a handsome painted window and shade it all round with Myrtles and Japonicas. I should like the window to open on to the Lake of Geneva—and there I'd sit and read all day like the picture of somebody reading."

For some time, in these letters to his sister, Keats expresses a constant anxiety at getting no news from their brother George at the distant Kentucky settlement whither he and his bride had at their last advices been bound. In the middle of April news of them arrives, and he thereupon sends off to them a long journal-letter which he has been writing up at intervals during the last two months. Among all the letters of Keats, this is perhaps the richest and most characteristic. It is full of the varied matter of his thoughts, excepting always his thoughts of love: these are only to be discerned in one trivial allusion, and more indistinctly in the vaguely passionate tenor of two sonnets which he sends among other specimens of his latest work in verse. One is that beginning 'Why did I laugh to-night?'—the other that, beautiful and moving despite flaws of execution,

in which he describes a dream suggested by the Paolo and Francesca passage in Dante. For the rest he passes disconnectedly as usual—"it being an impossibility in grain," as Keats once wrote to Reynolds, "for my ink to stain otherwise"—from the vein of fun and freakishness to that of poetry and wisdom, with passages now of masterly intuition, and now of wandering and uncertain, almost always beautiful, speculative fancy, interspersed with expressions of the most generous spirit of family affection, or the most searching and unaffected disclosures of self-knowledge. Poetry and Beauty were the twin powers his soul had ever worshipped; but his devotion to poetry seemed thus far to promise him no reward either in fame or bread; while beauty had betrayed her servant, and become to him a scorching instead of a sustaining power, since his love for the beautiful in general had turned into a craving passion for the beauty of a particular girl. As his flesh began to faint in the service of these two, his soul turned often with a sense of comfort, at times even almost of ecstasy, towards the milder divinity of Death, whose image had never been unfamiliar to his thoughts:—

"Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed,
But Death intenser—Death is Life's high meed."

When he came down from these heights of feeling, and brought himself soberly to face the facts of his existence, Keats felt himself compelled, in those days while he was producing, 'out of the mere yearning and fondness he had for the beautiful,' poem after poem that are among the treasures of the English language, to consider whether as a practical matter he could or ought to continue to apply himself to literature at all. In spite of his magnanimous first reception of the *Blackwood* and *Quarterly*

gibes, we can see that as time went on he began more and more to feel both his pride wounded and his prospects darkened by them. Reynolds had hit the mark, as to the material harm which the reviews were capable of inflicting, when he wrote the year before:—"Certain it is, that hundreds of fashionable and flippant readers will henceforth set down this young poet as a pitiable and nonsensical writer, merely on the assertions of some single heartless critic, who has just energy enough to despise what is good." Such in fact was exactly the reputation which *Blackwood* and the *Quarterly* had succeeded in making for Keats, except among a small private circle of admirers. Of praise and the thirst for praise he continues to speak in as manly and sane a tone as ever; especially in the two sonnets *On Fame*; and in the *Ode to Indolence* declares—

"For I would not be dieted with praise,
A pet-lamb in a sentimental farce."

Again in the same ode, he speaks of his 'demon Poesy' as 'a maiden most unmeek,' whom he loves the better the more blame is heaped on her. At the same time he shows his sense of the practical position which the reviews had made for him when he writes to his brother:—"These reviews are getting more and more powerful, especially the 'Quarterly'....I was in hopes that as people saw, as they must do, all the trickery and iniquity of these plagues, they would scout them; but no; they are like the spectators at the Westminster cockpit, and do not care who wins or loses." And as a consequence he adds presently, "I have been, at different times, turning it in my head whether I should go to Edinburgh and study for a physician. I am afraid I should not take kindly to it; I am sure I could not take fees; and

yet I should like to do so ; it is not worse than writing poems, and hanging them up to be fly-blown on the Review shambles." A little later he mentions to his sister Fanny an idea he has of taking a voyage or two as surgeon on board an East Indiaman. But Brown, more than ever impressed during these last months with the power and promise of his friend's genius, would not hear of this plan, and persuaded him to abandon it and throw himself again upon literature. Keats being for the moment unable to get at any of his money, Brown advanced him enough to live on through the summer ; and it was agreed that he should go and work in the country, and that Brown should follow him.

Towards the end of July Keats accordingly left Hampstead, and went first to join his friend Rice in lodgings at Shanklin. Rice's health was at this time worse than ever ; and Keats himself was far from well ; his chest weak, his nerves unstrung, his heart, as we can see by his letters to Fanny Brawne, incessantly distracted between the pains and joys of love. These love-letters of Keats are written with little or none of the bright ease and play of mind which make his correspondence with his friends and family so attractive. Pleasant passages, indeed, occur in them, but in the main they are constrained and distressing, showing him a prey, despite his efforts to master himself and be reasonable, to an almost abject intensity and fretfulness of passion. An enraptured but an untrustful lover, alternately rejoicing and chafing at his bondage, and passing through a hundred conflicting extremes of feeling in an hour, he found in the fever of work and composition his only antidote against the fever of his love-sickness. As long as Rice and he were together at Shanklin, the two ailing and anxious men,

firm friends as they were, depressed and did each other harm. It was better when Brown with his settled health and spirits came to join them. Soon afterwards Rice left, and Brown and Keats then got to work diligently at the task they had set before themselves, that of writing a tragedy suitable for the stage. What other struggling man of letters has not at one time or another shared the hope which animated them, that this way lay the road to success and competence? Brown, whose Russian opera had made a hit in its day, and brought him in £500, was supposed to possess the requisite stage experience, and to him were assigned the plot and construction of the play, while Keats undertook to compose the dialogue. The subject was one taken from the history of the Emperor Otho the Great. The two friends sat opposite each other at the same table, and Keats wrote scene after scene as Brown sketched it out to him, in each case without enquiring what was to come next, until the end of the fourth act, when he took the conduct of the rest into his own hands. Besides the joint work by means of which he thus hoped, at least in sanguine hours, to find an escape from material difficulties, Keats was busily engaged by himself in writing a new Greek tale in rhymed heroics, *Lamia*. But a cloud of depression continued to hang over him. The climate of Shanklin was against him: their lodgings were under the cliff, and from the south-east, as he afterwards wrote, "came the damps of the sea, which having no egress, the air would for days together take on an unhealthy idiosyncrasy altogether enervating and weakening as a city smoke." After a stay of five or six weeks, the friends made up their minds to change their quarters, and went in the second week of August to Winchester. The old cathedral city, with its

peaceful closes breathing antiquity, its clear-coursing streams and beautiful elm-shadowed meadow walks, and the nimble and pure air of its surrounding downs, exactly suited Keats, who quickly improved both in health and spirits. The days which he spent here, from the middle of August to the middle of October, were the last good days of his life. Working with a steady intensity of application, he managed to steel himself for the time being against the importunity of his passion, although never without a certain feverishness in the effort.

His work continued to be chiefly on *Lamia*, with the concluding part of *Otho*, and the beginning of a new tragedy on the story of King Stephen; in this last he laboured alone, without accepting help from Brown. Early in September Brown left Winchester to go on a visit to Bedhampton. Immediately afterwards a letter from America compelled Keats to go to town and arrange with Mr Abbey for the despatch of fresh remittances to his brother George. He dared not, to use his own words, 'venture into the fire' by going to see his mistress at Hampstead, but stayed apparently with Mr Taylor in Fleet Street, and was back on the fourth day at Winchester, where he spent the following ten days or fortnight in solitude. During this interval he took up *Hyperion* again, but made up his mind to go no farther with it, having got to feel its style and method too Miltonic and artificial. *Lamia* he had finished, and his chief present occupation was in revising the *Eve of St Agnes*, studying Italian in the pages of Ariosto, and writing up one of his long and full journal-letters to brother and sister George. The season was fine, and the beauty of the walks and the weather entering into his spirit, prompted also in these days the last, and one certainly of the

happiest, of his odes, that *To Autumn*. To the fragment of *St Mark's Eve*, begun or planned, as we have seen, the January before, he now added lines inspired at once by the spirit of city quietude, which his letters show to have affected him deeply here at Winchester, and by the literary example of Chatterton, for whom his old admiration had of late returned in full force.

The wholesome brightness of the early autumn continuing to sustain and soothe him, Keats made in these days a vigorous effort to rally his moral powers, to banish over-passionate and morbid feelings, and to put himself on a right footing with the world. The letter to America already mentioned, and others written at the same time to Reynolds, Taylor, Dilke, Brown, and Haydon, are full of evidences of this spirit. The ill success of his brother in his American speculations shall serve, he is determined, as a spur to his own exertions, and now that real troubles are upon them, he will show that he can bear them better than those of imagination. The imaginary nail a man down for a sufferer, as on a cross; the real spur him up into an agent. He has been passing his time between reading, writing, and fretting; the last he now intends to give up, and stick to the other two. He does not consider he has any just cause of complaint against the world; he has done nothing as yet except for the amusement of a few people predisposed for sentiment, and is convinced that any thing really fine will make its way. "What reviewers can put a hindrance to must be a nothing—or mediocre which is worse." With reference to his own plans for the future, he is determined to trust no longer to mere hopes of ultimate success, whether from plays or poems, but to turn to the natural resource of a man 'fit

for nothing but literature' and needing to support himself by his pen: the resource, that is, of journalism and reviewing. "I will write, on the liberal side of the question, for whoever will pay me. I have not known yet what it is to be diligent. I purpose living in town in a cheap lodging, and endeavouring for a beginning, to get the theatricals of some paper. When I can afford to compose deliberate poems, I will." These words are from a letter written to Brown on the 22nd of September, and further on in the same letter we find evidence of the honourable spirit of independence and unselfishness towards his friends which went together in Keats, as it too rarely does, with an affectionate willingness to accept their services at a pinch. He had been living since May on a loan from Brown and an advance from Taylor, and was uneasy at putting the former to a sacrifice. The subject, he says, is often in his mind,—

"and the end of my speculations is always an anxiety for your happiness. This anxiety will not be one of the least incitements to the plan I propose pursuing. I had got into a habit of mind of looking towards you as a help in all difficulties. You will see it is a duty I owe myself to break the neck of it. I do nothing for my subsistence—make no exertion. At the end of another year you shall applaud me, not for verses, but for conduct."

Brown, returning to Winchester a few days later, found his friend unshaken in the same healthy resolutions, and however loth to lose his company, and doubtful of his power to live the life he proposed, respected their motives too much to contend against them. It was accordingly settled that the two friends should part, Brown returning to his own house at Hampstead, while Keats went to live by himself in London and look out for employment on the press.

CHAPTER VII.

*Isabella—Hyperion—The Eve of St Agnes—The Eve of St Mark—
La Belle Dame Sans Merci—Lamia—The Odes—The Plays.*

DURING the twenty months ending with his return from Winchester as last narrated, Keats had been able, even while health and peace of mind and heart deserted him, to produce in quick succession the series of poems which give us the true measure of his powers. In the sketches and epistles of his first volume we have seen him beginning, timidly and with no clearness of aim, to make trial of his poetical resources. A year afterwards he had leapt, to use his own words, headlong into the sea, and boldly tried his strength on the composition of a long mythological romance—half romance, half parable of that passion for universal beauty of which he felt in his own bosom the restless and compulsive workings. In the execution, he had done injustice to the power of poetry that was in him by letting both the exuberance of fancy and invention, and the caprice of rhyme, run away with him, and by substituting for the worn-out verbal currency of the last century a semi-Elizabethan coinage of his own, less acceptable by habit to the literary sense, and often of not a whit greater real poetic value. The experiment was rash, but when

he next wrote, it became manifest that it had not been made in vain. After *Endymion* his work threw off, not indeed entirely its faults, but all its weakness and ineffectiveness, and shone for the first time with a full 'effluence' (the phrase is Landor's) 'of power and light!'

His next poem of importance was *Isabella*, planned and begun, as we saw, in February 1818, and finished in the course of the next two months at Teignmouth. The subject is taken from the well-known chapter of Boccaccio which tells of the love borne by a damsel of Messina for a youth in the employ of her merchant-brothers, with its tragic close and pathetic sequel¹. Keats for some reason transfers the scene of the story from Messina to Florence. Nothing can be less sentimental than Boccaccio's temper, nothing more direct and free from superfluity than his style. Keats invoking him asks pardon for his own work as what it truly is,—'An echo of thee in the North-wind sung.' Not only does the English poet set the southern story in a framework of northern landscape, telling us of the Arno, for instance, how its stream—

"Gurgles through straitened banks, and still doth fan
Itself with dancing bulrush, and the bream
Keeps head against the freshets"—

he further adorns and amplifies it in a northern manner, enriching it with tones of sentiment and colours of romance, and brooding over every image of beauty or pas-

¹ See Appendix, p. 228.

² *Decamerone*, Giorn., iv. nov. 5. A very different metrical treatment of the same subject was attempted and published, almost simultaneously with that of Keats, by Barry Cornwall in his *Sicilian Story* (1820). Of the metrical tales from Boccaccio which Reynolds had agreed to write concurrently with Keats (see above, p. 86), two were finished and published by him after Keats's death in the volume called *A Garden of Florence* (1821).

sion as he calls it up. These things he does—but no longer inordinately as heretofore. His powers of imagination and of expression have alike gained strength and discipline ; and through the shining veils of his poetry his creations make themselves seen and felt in living shape, action, and motive. False touches and misplaced beauties are indeed not wanting. For example, in the phrase

“his erewhile timid lips grew bold
And poesied with hers in dewy rhyme,”

we have an effusively false touch, in the sugared taste not infrequent in his earliest verses. And in the call of the wicked brothers to Lorenzo—

“To-day we purpose, aye this hour we mount
To spur three leagues towards the Apennine.
Come down, we pray thee, ere the hot sun count
His dewy rosary on the eglantine,”—

the last two lines are a beauty indeed, and of the kind most characteristic of the poet, yet a beauty (as Leigh Hunt long ago pointed out) misplaced in the mouths that utter it. Moreover the language of *Isabella* is still occasionally slipshod, and there are turns and passages where we feel, as we felt so often in *Endymion*, that the poetic will has abdicated to obey the chance dictation or suggestion of the rhyme. But these are the minor blemishes of a poem otherwise conspicuous for power and charm.

For his Italian story Keats chose an Italian metre, the octave stanza introduced in English by Wyatt and Sidney, and naturalised before long by Daniel, Drayton, and Edward Fairfax. Since their day, the stanza had been little used in serious poetry, though Frere and Byron had lately revived it for the poetry of light narrative and satire, the purpose for which the epigrammatic

snap and suddenness of the closing couplet in truth best fit it. Keats, however, contrived generally to avoid this effect, and handles the measure flowingly and well in a manner suited to his tale of pathos. Over the purely musical and emotional resources of his art he shows a singular command in stanzas like that beginning, 'O Melancholy, linger here awhile,' repeated with variations as a kind of melodious interlude of the main narrative. And there is a brilliant alertness of imagination in such episodic passages as that where he pauses to realize the varieties of human toil contributing to the wealth of the merchant brothers. But the true test of a poem like this is that it should combine, at the essential points and central moments of action and passion, imaginative vitality and truth with beauty and charm. This test *Isabella* admirably bears. For instance, in the account of the vision which appears to the heroine of her lover's mouldering corpse:—

"Its eyes, though wild, were still all dewy-bright
With love, and kept all phantom fear aloof
From the poor girl by magic of their light."

With what a true poignancy of human tenderness is the story of the apparition invested by this touch, and all its charnel horror and grimness mitigated! Or again in the stanzas describing *Isabella's* actions at her lover's burial place:—

"She gazed into the fresh thrown mould, as though
One glance did fully all its secrets tell;
Clearly she saw, as other eyes would know
Pale limbs at bottom of a crystal well;
Upon the murderous spot she seem'd to grow,
Like to a native lily of the dell:
Then with her knife, all sudden, she began
To dig more fervently than misers can.

Soon she turn'd up a soiled glove, whereon
Her silk had play'd in purple phantasies ;
She kiss'd it with a lip more chill than stone,
And put it in her bosom, where it dries
And freezes utterly unto the bone

Those dainties made to still an infant's cries :
Then 'gan she work again ; nor stay'd her care,
But to throw back at times her veiling hair."

The lines are not all of equal workmanship : but the scene is realised with unerring vision. The swift despairing gaze of the girl, anticipating with too dire a certainty the realization of her dream : the simile in the third and fourth lines, emphasizing the clearness of that certainty, and at the same time relieving its terror by an image of beauty : the new simile of the lily, again striking the note of beauty, while it intensifies the impression of her rooted fixity of posture and purpose : the sudden solution of that fixity, with the final couplet, into vehement action, as she begins to dig 'more fervently than misers can' (what a commentary on the relative strength of passions might be drawn from this simple text):—then the first reward of her toil, in the shape of a relic not ghastly, but beautiful both in itself and for the tenderness of which it is a token : her womanly action in kissing it and putting it in her bosom, while all the woman and mother in her is in the same words revealed to us as blighted by the tragedy of her life : then the resumption and continuance of her labours, with gestures once more of vital dramatic truth as well as grace :—to imagine and to write like this is the privilege of the best poets only, and even the best have not often combined such concentrated force and beauty of conception with such a limpid and flowing ease of narrative. Poetry had always come to Keats, as he considered it ought

to come, as naturally as leaves to a tree; and now that it came of a quality like this, he had fairly earned the right, which his rash youth had too soon arrogated, to look down on the fine artificers of the school of Pope. In comparison with the illuminating power of true imaginative poetry, the closest rhetorical condensations of that school seem loose and thin, their most glittering points and aphorisms dull: nay, those who admire them most justly will know better than to think the two kinds of writing comparable.

After the completion of *Isabella* followed the Scotch tour, of which the only poetic fruits of value were the lines on Meg Merrilies and those on Fingal's Cave. Returning in shaken health to the bedside of a brother mortally ill, Keats plunged at once into the most arduous poetic labour he had yet undertaken. This was the composition of *Hyperion*¹. The subject had been long in his mind, and both in the text and the preface of *Endymion* he indicated his intention to attempt it. At first he thought of the poem to be written as a 'romance': but under the influence of *Paradise Lost*, and no doubt also considering the height and vastness of the subject, his plan changed to that of a blank verse epic in ten books. His purpose was to sing the Titanomachia, or warfare of the earlier Titanic dynasty with the later Olympian dynasty of the Greek gods; and in particular one episode of that warfare, the dethronement of the sun-god Hyperion and the assumption of his kingdom by Apollo. Critics, even intelligent critics, sometimes complain that Keats should have taken this and other

¹ As to the date when *Hyperion* was written, see Appendix, p. 228: and as to the error by which Keats's later recast of his work has been taken for an earlier draft, *ibid.*, p. 230.

subjects of his art from what they call the 'dead' mythology of ancient Greece. As if that mythology could ever die: as if the ancient fables, in passing out of the transitory state of things believed, into the state of things remembered and cherished in imagination, had not put on a second life more enduring and more fruitful than the first. Faiths, as faiths, perish one after another: but each in passing away bequeaths for the enrichment of the after-world whatever elements it has contained of imaginative or moral truth or beauty. The polytheism of ancient Greece, embodying the instinctive effort of the brightest-gifted human race to explain its earliest experiences of nature and civilization, of the thousand moral and material forces, cruel or kindly, which environ and control the life of man on earth, is rich beyond measure in such elements; and if the modern world at any time fails to value them, it is the modern mind which is in so far dead and not they. One of the great symptoms of returning vitality in the imagination of Europe, toward the close of the last century, was its awakening to the forgotten charm of past modes of faith and life. When men, in the earlier part of that century, spoke of Greek antiquity, it was in stale and borrowed terms which showed that they had never felt its power; just as, when they spoke of nature, it was in set phrases that showed that they had never looked at her. On matters of daily social experience the gifts of observation and of reason were brilliantly exercised, but all the best thoughts of the time were thoughts of the street, the mart, and the assembly. The human genius was for the time being like some pilgrim long detained within city walls, and unused to see or think of anything beyond them. At length resuming its march, it emerged on open

ground, where it fell to enjoying with a forgotten zest the beauties of the earth and sky, and whence at the same time it could turn back to gaze on regions it had long left behind, discerning with new clearness and a new emotion, here under cloud and rainbow the forests and spired cities of the Middle Age, there in serener light the hills and havens and level fanes of Hellas.

The great leader and pioneer of the modern spirit on this new phase of its pilgrimage was Goethe, who with deliberate effort and self-discipline climbed to heights commanding an equal survey over the mediæval and the classic past. We had in England had an earlier, shyer, and far less effectual pioneer in Gray. As time went on, poet after poet arose and sang more freely, one the glories of nature, another the enchantments of the Middle Age, another the Greek beauty and joy of life. Keats when his time came showed himself, all young and untutored as he was, freshly and powerfully inspired to sing of all three alike. He does not, as we have said, write of Greek things in a Greek manner. Something indeed in *Hyperion*—at least in the first two books—he has caught from *Paradise Lost* of the high restraint and calm which was common to the Greeks and Milton. But to realise how far he is in workmanship from the Greek purity and precision of outline, and firm definition of individual images, we have only to think of his palace of Hyperion, with its vague far-dazzling pomps and phantom terrors of coming doom. This is the most sustained and celebrated passage of the poem. Or let us examine one of its most characteristic images from nature:—

“As when, upon a tranced summer night,
Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,
Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,
Dream, and so dream all night without a stir—”

Not to the simplicity of the Greek, but to the complexity of the modern, sentiment of nature, it belongs to try and express, by such a concourse of metaphors and epithets, every effect at once, to the most fugitive, which a forest scene by starlight can have upon the mind: the pre-eminence of the oaks among the other trees—their aspect of human venerableness—their verdure, unseen in the darkness—the sense of their preternatural stillness and suspended life in an atmosphere that seems to vibrate with mysterious influences communicated between earth and sky¹.

But though Keats sees the Greek world from afar, he sees it truly. The Greek touch is not his, but in his own rich and decorated English way he writes with a sure insight into the vital meaning of Greek ideas. For the story of the war of Titans and Olympians he had nothing to guide him except scraps from the ancient writers, principally Hesiod, as retailed by the compilers of classical dictionaries; and from the scholar's point of view his version, we can see, would at many points have been arbitrary, mixing up Latin conceptions and nomenclature with Greek, and introducing much new matter of his own invention. But as to the essential meaning of that warfare and its result—the dethronement of an older and ruder worship by one more advanced and humane, in which ideas of ethics and of arts held a larger place beside ideas of nature and her brute powers,—as to

¹ If we want to see Greek themes treated in a Greek manner by predecessors or contemporaries of Keats, we can do so—though only on a cameo scale—in the best idyls of Chénier in France, as *L'Aveugle* or *Le Jeune Malade*, or of Landor in England, as the *Hamadryad* or *Enallos* and *Cymodamia*; poems which would hardly have been written otherwise at Alexandria in the days of Theocritus.

this, it could not possibly be divined more truly, or illustrated with more beauty and force, than by Keats in the speech of Oceanus in the Second Book. Again, in conceiving and animating these colossal shapes of early gods, with their personalities between the elemental and the human, what masterly justice of instinct does he show,—to take one point only—in the choice of similitudes, drawn from the vast inarticulate sounds of nature, by which he seeks to make us realize their voices. Thus of the assembled gods when Saturn is about to speak :—

“There is a roaring in the bleak-grown pines
When Winter lifts his voice; there is a noise
Among immortals when a God gives sign,
With hushing finger, how he means to load
His tongue with the full weight of utterless thought,
With thunder, and with music, and with pomp :
Such noise is like the roar of bleak-grown pines.”

Again, of Oceanus answering his fallen chief :—

“So ended Saturn; and the God of the Sea,
Sophist and sage, from no Athenian grove,
But cogitation in his watery shades,
Arose, with locks not oozy, and began,
In murmurs, which his first-endeavouring tongue
Caught infant-like from the far-foamed sands.”

And once more, of Clymene followed by Enceladus in debate :—

“So far her voice flow’d on, like timorous brook
That, lingering along a pebbled coast,
Doth fear to meet the sea: but sea it met,
And shudder’d; for the overwhelming voice
Of huge Enceladus swallow’d it in wrath:
The ponderous syllables, like sullen waves
In the half-glutted hollows of reef-rocks,
Came booming thus.”

This second book of *Hyperion*, relating the council

of the dethroned Titans, has neither the sublimity of the first, where the solemn opening vision of Saturn fallen is followed by the resplendent one of Hyperion threatened in his 'lucent empire'; nor the intensity of the unfinished third, where we leave Apollo undergoing a convulsive change under the afflatus of Mnemosyne, and about to put on the full powers of his godhead. But it has a rightness and controlled power of its own which place it, to my mind, quite on a level with the other two.

With a few slips and inequalities, and one or two instances of verbal incorrectness, *Hyperion*, as far as it was written, is indeed one of the grandest poems in our language, and in its grandeur seems one of the easiest and most spontaneous. Keats, however, had never been able to apply himself to it continuously, but only by fits and starts. Partly this was due to the distractions of bereavement, of material anxiety, and of dawning passion amid which it was begun and continued: partly (if we may trust the statement of the publishers) to disappointment at the reception of *Endymion*: and partly, it is clear, to something not wholly congenial to his powers in the task itself. When after letting the poem lie by through the greater part of the spring and summer of 1819, he in September made up his mind to give it up, he wrote to Reynolds explaining his reasons as follows. "There were too many Miltonic inversions in it—Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful, or rather, artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up." In the same connection he declares that Chatterton is the purest writer in the English language. "He has no French idiom or particles, like Chaucer; it is genuine English idiom in English words." In writing about

the same time to his brother, he again expresses similar opinions both as to Milton and Chatterton.

The influence, and something of the majesty, of *Paradise Lost* are in truth to be found in *Hyperion*: and the debate of the fallen Titans in the second book is obviously to some extent modelled on the debate of the fallen angels. But Miltonic the poem hardly is in any stricter sense. Passing by those general differences that arise from the contrast of Milton's age with Keats's youth, of his austerity with Keats's luxuriance of spirit, and speaking of palpable and technical differences only:—in the matter of rhythm, Keats's blank verse has not the flight of Milton's. Its periods do not wheel through such stately evolutions to so solemn and far-foreseen a close; though it indeed lacks neither power nor music, and ranks unquestionably with the finest blank-verse written since Milton,—beside that of Shelley's *Alastor*,—perhaps a little below that of Wordsworth when Wordsworth is at his infrequent best. As to diction and the poetic use of words, Keats shows almost as masterly an instinct as Milton himself: but while of Milton's diction the characteristic colour is derived from reading and meditation, from an impassioned conversance with the contents of books, the characteristic colour of Keats's diction is rather derived from conversance with nature and with the extreme refinements of physical sensation. He is no match for Milton in a passage of this kind:—

“Eden stretch'd her line
From Auran eastward to the royal towers
Of great Seleucia, built by Grecian kings,
Or where the sons of Eden long before
Dwelt in Telassar.”

But then neither is Milton a match for Keats in work like this:—

“throughout all the isle
There was no covert, no retired cave
Unhaunted by the murmurous noise of waves,
Though scarcely heard in many a green recess.”

After the pomp and glow of learned allusion, the second chief technical note of Milton's style is his partiality for a Latin use of the relative pronoun and the double negative, and for scholarly Latin turns and constructions generally. Already in *Isabella* Keats is to be found attempting both notes, thus :—

“With duller steel than the Persean sword
They cut away no formless monster's head—.”

Similar Miltonic echoes occur in *Hyperion*, as in the introduction already quoted to the speech of Oceanus : or again thus :—

“Then, as was wont, his palace-door flew ope
In smoothest silence, save what solemn tubes,
Blown by the serious Zephyra, gave of sweet
And wandering sounds, slow-breathed melodies.”

But they are not frequent, nor had Keats adopted as much of Milton's technical manner as he seems to have supposed. Yet he had adopted more of it than was natural to him or than he cared to maintain.

In turning away from Milton to Chatterton, he was going back to one of his first loves in literature. What he says of Chatterton's words and idioms seems paradoxical enough, as applied to the archaic jargon concocted by the Bristol boy out of Kersey's *Dictionary*¹. But it is true that through that jargon can be discerned, in the

¹ We are not surprised to hear of Keats, with his instinct for the best, that what he most liked in Chatterton's work was the minstrel's song in *Ellis*, that *fantasia*, so to speak, executed really with genius on the theme of one of Ophelia's songs in *Hamlet*.

Rowley poems, not only an ardent feeling for romance and an extraordinary facility in composition, but a remarkable gift of plain and flowing construction. And after Keats had for some time moved, not perfectly at his ease, though with results to us so masterly, in the paths of Milton, we find him in fact tempted aside on an excursion into the regions beloved by Chatterton. We know not how much of *Hyperion* had been written when he laid it aside in January to take up the composition of *St Agnes' Eve*, that unsurpassed example—nay, must we not rather call it unequalled!—of the pure charm of coloured and romantic narrative in English verse. As this poem does not attempt the elemental grandeur of *Hyperion*, so neither does it approach the human pathos and passion of *Isabella*. Its personages appeal to us, not so much humanly and in themselves, as by the circumstances, scenery and atmosphere amidst which we see them move. Herein lies the strength, and also the weakness, of modern romance,—its strength, inasmuch as the charm of the mediæval colour and mystery is unfailing for those who feel it at all,—its weakness, inasmuch as under the influence of that charm both writer and reader are too apt to forget the need for human and moral truth : and without these no great literature can exist.

Keats takes in this poem the simple, almost threadbare theme of the love of an adventurous youth for the daughter of a hostile house,—a story wherein something of Romeo and Juliet is mixed with something of young Lochinvar,—and brings it deftly into association with the old popular belief as to the way a maiden might on this anniversary win sight of her lover in a dream. Choosing happily, for such a purpose, the Spenserian stanza, he

adds to the melodious grace, the 'sweet-slipping movement,' as it has been called, of Spenser, a transparent ease and directness of construction; and with this ease and directness combines (wherein lies the great secret of his ripened art) a never-failing richness and concentration of poetic meaning and suggestion. From the opening stanza, which makes us feel the chill of the season to our bones,—telling us first of its effect on the wild and tame creatures of wood and field, and next how the frozen breath of the old beadsman in the chapel aisle 'seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,'—from thence to the close, where the lovers make their way past the sleeping porter and the friendly bloodhound into the night, the poetry seems to throb in every line with the life of imagination and beauty. It indeed plays in great part about the external circumstances and decorative adjuncts of the tale. But in handling these Keats's method is the reverse of that by which some writers vainly endeavour to rival in literature the effects of the painter and sculptor. He never writes for the eye merely, but vivifies everything he touches, telling even of dead and senseless things in terms of life, movement, and feeling. Thus the monuments in the chapel aisle are brought before us, not by any effort of description, but solely through our sympathy with the shivering fancy of the beadsman:—

"Knights, ladies, praying in dumb oratories,

He passeth by; and his weak spirit fails

To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails."

Even into the sculptured heads of the corbels in the banquetting hall the poet strikes life:—

"The carved angels, ever eager-eyed,

Stared, where upon their heads the cornice rests,

With wings blown back, and hands put cross-wise on their breasts."

The painted panes in the chamber window, instead of trying to pick out their beauties in detail, he calls—

“Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes
As are the tiger-moth’s deep-damask’d wings,—”

a gorgeous phrase which leaves the widest range to the colour-imagination of the reader, giving it at the same time a sufficient clue by the simile drawn from a particular specimen of nature’s blazonry. In the last line of the same stanza—

“A shielded scutcheon blush’d with blood of queens and kings,”
—the word ‘blush’ makes the colour seem to come and go, while the mind is at the same time sent travelling from the maiden’s chamber on thoughts of her lineage and ancestral fame. Observation, I believe, shows that moonlight has not the power to transmit the hues of painted glass as Keats in this celebrated passage represents it. Let us be grateful for the error, if error it is, which has led him to heighten, by these saintly splendours of colour, the sentiment of a scene wherein a voluptuous glow is so exquisitely attuned with chivalrous chastity and awe. When Madeline unclasps her jewels, a weaker poet would have dwelt on their lustre or other visible qualities: Keats puts those aside, and speaks straight to our spirits in an epithet breathing with the very life of the wearer,—‘her warmed jewels.’ When Porphyro spreads the feast of dainties beside his sleeping mistress, we are made to feel how those ideal and rare sweets of sense surround and minister to her, not only with their own natural richness, but with the associations and the homage of all far countries whence they have been gathered—

“From silken Samarcand to cedar’d Lebanon.”

If the unique charm of the *Eve of St Agnes* lies thus in the richness and vitality of the accessory and decorative images, the actions and emotions of the personages are hardly less happily conceived as far as they go. What can be better touched than the figures of the beadsman and the nurse, who live just long enough to share in the wonders of the night, and die quietly of age when their parts are over¹: especially the debate of old Angela with Porphyro, and her gentle treatment by her mistress on the stair? Madeline is exquisite throughout, but most of all, I think, at two moments: first when she has just entered her chamber,—

“No uttered syllable, or, woe betide :
But to her heart, her heart was voluble,
Paining with eloquence her balmy side :”—

and afterwards when, awakening, she finds her lover beside her, and contrasts his bodily presence with her dream :—

“‘Ah Porphyro!’ said she, ‘but even now
Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear
Made tunable with every sweetest vow ;
And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear ;
How changed thou art ! how pallid, chill, and drear’.”

Criticism may urge, indeed, that in the ‘growing faint’ of Porphyro, and in his ‘warm unnerved arm,’ we have a touch of that swooning abandonment to which

¹ A critic, not often so in error, has contended that the deaths of the beadsman and Angela in the concluding stanza are due to the exigencies of rhyme. On the contrary, they are foreseen from the first: that of the beadsman in the lines,

“But no—already had his death-bell rung;
The joys of all his life were said and sung;”

that of Angela where she calls herself

“A poor, weak, palsy-stricken, churchyard thing,
Whose passing bell may ere the midnight toll.”

Keats's heroes are too subject. But it is the slightest possible; and after all the trait belongs not more to the poet individually than to his time. Lovers in prose romances of that date are constantly overcome in like manner. And we may well pardon Porphyro his weakness, in consideration of the spirit which has led him to his lady's side in defiance of her 'whole bloodthirsty race,' and will bear her safely, this night of happy marvels over, to the home 'beyond the southern moors' that he has prepared for her¹.

Nearly allied with the *Eve of St Agnes* is the fragment in the four-foot ballad metre, which Keats composed on the parallel popular belief connected with the eve of St Mark. This piece was planned, as we saw, at Ohichester, and written, it appears, partly there and partly at Winchester six months later: the name of the heroine, Bertha, seems farther to suggest associations with Canterbury. Impressions of all these three cathedral cities which Keats knew are combined, no doubt, in the picture of which the fragment consists. I have said picture, but there are two: one the out-door picture of the city streets in their spring freshness and Sabbath peace: the other the indoor picture of the maiden reading in her quaint fire-lit chamber. Each in its way is of an admirable vividness and charm. The belief about St Mark's Eve was that a person stationed near a church porch at twilight on that anniversary would see entering the church the apparitions of those about to die, or be brought near death, in the ensuing year. Keats's fragment breaks off before the story is well engaged, and it is not easy to see how his opening would have led up to incidents illustrating this belief. Neither is it clear

¹ See Appendix, p. 229.

whether he intended to place them in mediæval or in relatively modern times. The demure Protestant air which he gives the Sunday streets, the Oriental furniture and curiosities of the lady's chamber, might seem to indicate the latter: but we must remember that he was never strict in his archæology—witness, for instance, the line which tells how 'the long carpets rose along the gusty floor' in the *Eve of St Agnes*. The interest of the *St Mark's* fragment, then, lies not in moving narrative or the promise of it, but in two things: first, its pictorial brilliance and charm of workmanship: and second, its relation to and influence on later English poetry. Keats in this piece anticipates in a remarkable degree the feeling and method of the modern pre-Raphaelite schools. The indoor scene of the girl over her book, in its insistent delight in vivid colour and the minuteness of far-sought suggestive and picturesque detail, is perfectly in the spirit of Rossetti (whom we know that the fragment deeply impressed and interested),—of his pictures even more than of his poems: while in the outdoor work we seem to find forestalled the very tones and cadences of Mr Morris in some tale of the *Earthly Paradise*:—

"The city streets were clean and fair
From wholesome drench of April rains;
And on the western window panes
The chilly sunset faintly told
Of unmatured green valleys cold,
Of the green thorny bloomless hedge,
Of rivers new with springtide sedge."

Another poem of the same period, romantic in a different sense, is *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. The title is taken from that of a poem by Alain Chartier,—the

secretary and court poet of Charles VI. and Charles VII. of France,—of which an English translation used to be attributed to Chaucer, and is included in the early editions of his works. This title had caught Keats's fancy, and in the *Eve of St Agnes* he makes Lorenzo waken Madeline by playing beside her bed—

“an ancient ditty, long since mute,
In Provence call'd ‘La belle dame sans merci’.”

The syllables continuing to haunt him, he wrote in the course of the spring or summer (1819) a poem of his own on the theme, which has no more to do with that of Chartier than Chartier has really to do with Provence¹. Keats's ballad can hardly be said to tell a story; but rather sets before us, with imagery drawn from the mediæval world of enchantment and knight-errantry, a type of the wasting power of love, when either adverse fate or deluded choice makes of love not a blessing but a bane. The plight which the poet thus shadows forth is partly that of his own soul in thralldom. Every reader must feel how truly the imagery expresses the passion: how powerfully, through these fascinating old-world symbols, the universal heart of man is made to speak. To many students (of whom the present writer is one) the union of infinite tenderness with a weird intensity, the conciseness and purity of the poetic form, the wild yet simple magic of the cadences, the perfect ‘inevitable’ union of sound and sense, make of *La Belle Dame sans*

¹ Chartier was born at Bayeux. His *Belle Dame sans Merci* is a poem of over eighty stanzas, the introduction in narrative and the rest in dialogue, setting forth the obduracy shown by a lady to her wooer, and his consequent despair and death.—For the date of composition of Keats's poem, see Appendix, p. 230.

Merci the master-piece, not only among the shorter poems of Keats, but even (if any single master-piece must be chosen) among them all.

Before finally giving up *Hyperion* Keats had conceived and written, during his summer months at Shanklin and Winchester, another narrative poem on a Greek subject: but one of those where Greek life and legend come nearest to the mediæval, and give scope both for scenes of wonder and witchcraft, and for the stress and vehemence of passion. I speak, of course, of *Lamia*, the story of the serpent-lady, both enchantress and victim of enchantments, who loves a youth of Corinth, and builds for him by her art a palace of delights, until their happiness is shattered by the scrutiny of intrusive and cold-blooded wisdom. Keats had found the germ of the story, quoted from Philostratus, in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. In versifying it he went back once more to rhymed heroics; handling them, however, not as in *Endymion*, but in a manner founded on that of Dryden, with a free use of the Alexandrine, a more sparing one of the overflow and the irregular pause, and of disyllabic rhymes none at all. In the measure as thus treated by Keats there is a fire and grace of movement, a lithe and serpentine energy, well suited to the theme, and as effective in its way as the victorious march of Dryden himself. Here is an example where the poetry of Greek mythology is finely woven into the rhetoric of love:—

“Leave thee alone! Look back! Ah, goddess, see
Whether my eyes can ever turn from thee!
For pity do not this sad heart belie—
Even as thou vanishest so I shall die.
Stay! though a Naiad of the rivers, stay!
To thy far wishes will thy streams obey:

Stay! though the greenest woods be thy domain,
Alone they can drink up the morning rain:
Though a descended Pleiad, will not one
Of thine harmonious sisters keep in tune
Thy spheres, and as thy silver proxy shine?"

And here an instance of the power and reality of scenic imagination :—

"As men talk in a dream, so Corinth all,
Throughout her palaces imperial,
And all her populous streets and temples lewd,
Mutter'd, like tempest in the distance brew'd,
To the wide-spreaded night above her towers.
Men, women, rich and poor, in the cool hours,
Shuffled their sandals o'er the pavement white,
Companion'd or alone; while many a light
Flar'd, here and there, from wealthy festivals,
And threw their moving shadows on the walls,
Or found them cluster'd in the cornic'd shade
Of some arch'd temple door, or dusty colonnade."

No one can deny the truth of Keats's own criticism on *Lamia* when he says, "I am certain there is that sort of fire in it which must take hold of people in some way—give them either pleasant or unpleasant sensation." There is perhaps nothing in all his writing so vivid, or that so burns itself in upon the mind, as the picture of the serpent-woman awaiting the touch of *Hermes* to transform her, followed by the agonized process of the transformation itself. Admirably told, though perhaps somewhat disproportionately for its place in the poem, is the introductory episode of *Hermes* and his nymph: admirably again the concluding scene where the merciless gaze of the philosopher exorcises his pupil's dream of love and beauty, and the lover in forfeiting his illusion forfeits life. This thrilling vividness of narration in particular

points, and the fine melodious vigour of much of the verse, have caused some students to give *Lamia* almost the first, if not the first, place among Keats's narrative poems. But surely for this it is in some parts too feverish, and in others too unequal. It contains descriptions not entirely successful, as for instance that of the palace reared by Lamia's magic; which will not bear comparison with other and earlier dream-palaces of the poet's building. And it has reflective passages, as that in the first book beginning, 'Let the mad poets say whate'er they please,' and the first fifteen lines of the second, where from the winning and truly poetic ease of his style at its best, Keats relapses into something too like Leigh Hunt's and his own early strain of affected ease and fireside triviality. He shows at the same time signs of a return to his former rash experiments in language. The positive virtues of beauty and felicity in his diction had never been attended by the negative virtue of strict correctness: thus in the *Eve of St Agnes* we had to 'brook' tears for to check or forbear them, in *Hyperion* 'portion'd' for 'proportion'd'; eyes that 'fever out;' a chariot 'foam'd along.' Some of these verbal licences possess a force that makes them pass; but not so in *Lamia* the adjectives 'psalterian' and 'piazzian,' the verb 'to labyrinth,' and the participle 'daft,' as if from an imaginary active verb meaning to daze.

In the moral which the tale is made to illustrate there is moreover a weakness. Keats himself gives us fair warning against attaching too much importance to any opinion which in a momentary mood we may find him uttering. But the doctrine he sets forth in *Lamia* is one which from the reports of his conversation we know him to have held with a certain consistency:—

“Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven;
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an angel’s wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air and gnomed mine—
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
The tender-person’d Lamia melt into a shade.”

Campbell has set forth the same doctrine more fully in *The Rainbow*: but one sounder, braver, and of better hope, by which Keats would have done well to stand, is preached by Wordsworth in his famous Preface.

Passing, now, from the narrative to the reflective portion of Keats’s work during this period—it was on the odes, we saw, that he was chiefly occupied in the spring months of 1819, from the completion of *St Agnes’ Eve* at Chichester in January until the commencement of *Lamia* and *Otho the Great* at Shanklin in June. These odes of Keats constitute a class apart in English literature, in form and manner neither lineally derived from any earlier, nor much resembling any contemporary, verse. In what he calls the ‘roundelay’ of the Indian maiden in *Endymion* he had made his most elaborate lyrical attempt until now; and while for once approaching Shelley in lyric ardour and height of pitch, had equalled Coleridge in touches of wild musical beauty and far-sought romance. His new odes are comparatively simple and regular in form. They are written in a strain intense indeed, but meditative and brooding, and quite free from the declamatory and rhetorical elements which we are accustomed to associate with the idea of an ode. Of the five composed in the

spring of 1819, two, those on *Psyche* and the *Grecian Urn*, are inspired by the old Greek world of imagination and art; two, those on *Melancholy* and the *Nightingale*, by moods of the poet's own mind; while the fifth, that on *Indolence*, partakes in a weaker degree of both inspirations.

In the *Psyche*, (where the stanza is of a lengthened type approaching those of Spenser's nuptial odes, but not regularly repeated,) Keats recurs to a theme of which he had long been enamoured, as we know by the lines in the opening poem of his first book, beginning—

“So felt he, who first told how Psyche went
On the smooth wind to realms of wonderment.”

Following these lines, in his early piece, came others disfigured by cloying touches of the kind too common in his love-scenes. Nor are like touches quite absent from the ode: but they are more than compensated by the exquisite freshness of the natural scenery where the mythic lovers are disclosed—‘Mid hush'd, cool-rooted flowers fragrant-eyed.’ What other poet has compressed into a single line so much of the true life and charm of flowers, of their power to minister to the spirit of man through all his senses at once? Such felicity in compound epithets is by this time habitual with Keats, and of Spenser, with his ‘sea-shouldering whales,’ he is now in his own manner the equal. The ‘azure-lidded sleep’ of the maiden in *St Agnes’ Eve* is matched in this ode by the ‘moss-lain Dryads’ and the ‘soft-conchèd ear’ of Psyche; though the last epithet perhaps jars on us a little with a sense of oddity, like the ‘cirque-couchant’ snake in *Lamia*. For the rest, there is certainly something strained in the turn of thought and expression whereby the poet offers himself and the homage of his own mind

to the divinity he addresses, in lieu of the worship of antiquity for which she came too late ; and especially in the terms of the metaphor which opens the famous fourth stanza :—

“Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branched thoughts, new-blown with pleasant pain,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind.”

Yet over such difficulties the true lover of poetry will find himself swiftly borne, until he pauses breathless and delighted at the threshold of the sanctuary prepared by the ‘gardener Fancy,’ his ear charmed by the glow and music of the verse, with its hurrying pace and artfully iterated vowels towards the close, his mind enthralled by the beauty of the invocation and the imagery.

Less glowing, but of finer conception and more rare poetic value, is the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. Instead of the long and unequal stanza of the *Psyche*, it is written in a regular stanza of five rhymes, the first two arranged in a quatrain, and the second three in a sestet ; a plan to which Keats adhered in the rest of his odes, only varying the order of the sestet, and in one instance—the ode to *Melancholy*—expanding it into a septet. The sight, or the imagination, of a piece of ancient sculpture had set the poet’s mind at work, on the one hand conjuring up the scenes of ancient life and worship which lay behind and suggested the sculptured images ; on the other, speculating on the abstract relations of plastic art to life. The opening invocation is followed by a string of questions which flash their own answer upon us out of the darkness of antiquity—interrogatories which are at the same time pictures,—‘What men or gods are these, what maidens

loth,' &c. The second and third stanzas express with perfect poetic felicity and insight the vital differences between life, which pays for its unique prerogative of reality by satiety and decay, and art, which in forfeiting reality gains in exchange permanence of beauty, and the power to charm by imagined experiences even richer than the real. Then the questioning begins again, and yields the incomparable choice of pictures,—

“What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?”

In the answering lines—

“And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return,—”

in these lines there seems a dissonance, inasmuch as they speak of the arrest of life as though it were an infliction in the sphere of reality, and not merely, like the instances of such arrest given farther back, a necessary condition in the sphere of art, having in that sphere its own compensations. But it is a dissonance which the attentive reader can easily reconcile for himself: and none but an attentive reader will notice it. Finally, dropping the airy play of the mind backward and forward between the two spheres, the poet consigns the work of ancient skill to the future, to remain,—

“in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—”

thus proclaiming, in the last words, what amidst the gropings of reason and the flux of things is to the poet and artist—at least to one of Keats's temper—an immutable law.

It seems clear that no single extant work of antiquity can have supplied Keats with the suggestion for this poem. There exists, indeed, at Holland House an urn wrought with just such a scene of pastoral sacrifice as is described in his fourth stanza¹: and of course no subject is commoner in Greek relief-sculpture than a Bacchanalian procession. But the two subjects do not, so far as I know, occur together on any single work of ancient art: and Keats probably imagined his urn by a combination of sculptures actually seen in the British Museum with others known to him only from engravings, and particularly from Piranesi's etchings. Lord Holland's urn is duly figured in the *Vasi e Candelabri* of that admirable master. From the old Leigh Hunt days Keats had been fond of what he calls—

“the pleasant flow

Of words at opening a portfolio:”

and in the scene of sacrifice in *Endymion* (Book I, 136—163) we may perhaps already find a proof of familiarity with this particular print, as well as an anticipation of the more masterly poetic rendering of the subject in the ode.

The ode *On Indolence* stands midway, not necessarily in date of composition, but in scope and feeling, between the two Greek and the two personal odes, as I have above distinguished them. In it Keats again calls up the image of a marble urn, but not for its own sake, only to illustrate the guise in which he feigns the allegoric presences of Love, Ambition, and Poetry to have appeared to him in a day-dream. This ode, less highly wrought and more unequal than the rest, contains

¹ This has been pointed out by my colleague Mr A. S. Murray: see Forman, *Works*, vol. iii. p. 115, note; and W. T. Arnold, *Poetical Works*, &c., p. xxii, note.

the imaginative record of a passing mood (mentioned also in his correspondence) when the wonted intensity of his emotional life was suspended under the spell of an agreeable physical languor. Well had it been for him had such moods come more frequently to give him rest. Most sensitive among the sons of men, the sources of joy and pain lay close together in his nature: and unsatisfied passion kept both sources filled to bursting. One of the attributes he assigns to his enchantress Lamia is a

“sciential brain

To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain.”

In the fragmentary ode *On Melancholy* (which has no proper beginning, its first stanza having been discarded) he treats the theme of Beaumont and of Milton in a manner entirely his own: expressing his experience of the habitual interchange and alternation of emotions of joy and pain with a characteristic easy magnificence of imagery and style:—

“Aye, in the very Temple of Delight

Veil'd Melancholy has her sovereign shrine,

Though known to none save him whose strenuous tongue

Can burst joy's grape against his palate fine:

His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,

And be among her cloudy trophies hung.”

The same crossing and intermingling of opposite currents of feeling finds expression, together with unequalled touches of the poet's feeling for nature and romance, in the *Ode to a Nightingale*. Just as his Grecian urn was no single specimen of antiquity that he had seen, so it is not the particular nightingale he had heard singing in the Hampstead garden that he in his poem invokes, but a type of the race imagined as singing in some far-off scene of woodland mystery and beauty. Thither he sighs to follow her: first by aid of

the spell of some southern vintage—a spell which he makes us realize in lines redolent of the southern richness and joy. Then follows a contrasted vision of all his own and mankind's tribulations which he will leave behind him. Nay, he needs not the aid of Bacchus,—Poetry alone shall transport him. For a moment he mistrusts her power, but the next moment finds himself where he would be, listening to the imagined song in the imagined woodland, and divining in the darkness, by that gift whereby his mind is a match for nature, all the secrets of the season and the night. In this joy he remembers how often the thought of death has seemed welcome to him, and thinks it would be more welcome now than ever. The nightingale would not cease her song—and here, by a breach of logic which is also, I think, a flaw in the poetry, he contrasts the transitoriness of human life, meaning the life of the individual, with the permanence of the song-bird's life, meaning the life of the type. This last thought leads him off into the ages, whence he brings back those memorable touches of far-off Bible and legendary romance in the stanza closing with the words 'in faery lands forlorn': and then, catching up his own last word, 'forlorn,' with an abrupt change of mood and meaning, he returns to daily consciousness, and with the fading away of his forest dream the poem closes. In this group of the odes it takes rank beside the *Grecian Urn* in the other. Neither is strictly faultless, but such revealing imaginative insight and such conquering poetic charm, the touch that in striking so lightly strikes so deep, who does not prefer to faultlessness? Both odes are among the veriest glories of our poetry. Both are at the same time too long and too well known to quote. Let us therefore place here, as an

example of this class of Keats's work, the ode *To Autumn*, which is the last he wrote, and contains the record of his quiet September days at Winchester. It opens out, indeed, no such far-reaching avenues of thought and feeling as the two last mentioned, but in execution is perhaps the completest of them all. In the first stanza the bounty, in the last the pensiveness, of the time are expressed in words so transparent and direct that we almost forget they are words at all, and nature herself and the season seem speaking to us: while in the middle stanza the touches of literary art and Greek personification have an exquisite congruity and lightness.

"Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Sparcs the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cider-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river shallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.”

To pass from our poet's work at this time in the several fields of romance, epic, ballad, and ode, to those in the field of drama, is to pass from a region of happy and assured conquest to one of failure, though of failure not unredeemed by auguries of future success, had any future been in store for him. At his age no man has ever been a master in the drama: even by the most powerful intuitive genius, neither human nature nor the difficulties of the art itself can be so early mastered. The manner in which Keats wrote his first play, merely supplying the words to a plot contrived as they went along by a friend of gifts radically inferior to his own, was moreover the least favourable that he could have attempted. He brought to the task the mastery over poetic colour and diction which we have seen: he brought an impassioned sentiment of romance, and a mind prepared to enter by sympathy into the hearts of men and women: while Brown contributed his amateur stage-craft, such as it was. But these things were not enough. The power of sympathetic insight had not yet developed in Keats into one of dramatic creation: and the joint work of the friends is confused in order and sequence, and far from masterly in conception.

Keats indeed makes the characters speak in lines flashing with all the hues of poetry. But in themselves they have the effect only of puppets inexpertly agitated: Otho, a puppet type of royal dignity and fatherly affection, Ludolph of febrile passion and vacillation, Erminia of maidenly purity, Conrad and Auranthe of ambitious lust and treachery. At least until the end of the fourth act these strictures hold good. From that point Keats worked alone, and the fifth act, probably in consequence, shows a great improvement. There is a real dramatic effect, of the violent kind affected by the old English drama, in the disclosure of the body of Auranthe, dead indeed, at the moment when Ludolph in his madness vainly imagines himself to have slain her: and some of the speeches in which his frenzy breaks forth remind us strikingly of Marlowe, not only by their pomp of poetry and allusion, but by the tumult of the soul and senses expressed in them. Of the second historical play, *King Stephen*, which Keats began by himself at Winchester, too little was written to afford matter for a safe judgment. The few scenes he finished are not only marked by his characteristic splendour and felicity of phrase: they are full of a spirit of heady action and the stir of battle: qualities which he had not shown in any previous work, and for which we might have doubted his capacity had not this fragment been preserved.

But in the mingling of his soul's and body's destinies it had been determined that neither this nor any other of his powers should be suffered to ripen farther upon earth.

CHAPTER VIII.

Return to Wentworth Place—Autumn occupations: The *Cap and Bells*: Recast of *Hyperion*—Growing despondency—Visit of George Keats to England—Attack of illness in February—Rally in the Spring—Summer in Kentish Town—Publication of the *Lamia* volume—Relapse—Ordered South—Voyage to Italy—Naples—Rome—Last Days and Death. [October 1819—Feb. 1821.]

WE left Keats at Winchester, with *Otho*, *Lamia*, and the *Ode to Autumn* just written, and with his mind set on trying to face life sanely, and take up arms like other men against his troubles, instead of letting imagination magnify and passion exasperate them as heretofore. At his request Dilke took for him a lodging in his own neighbourhood in Westminster (25 College Street), and here Keats came on the 8th of October to take up his quarters. But alas! his blood proved traitor to his will: and the plan of life and literary work in London broke down at once on trial. The gain of health and composure which he thought he had made at Winchester proved illusory, or at least could only be maintained at a distance from the great perturbing cause. Two days after his return he went to Hampstead—‘into the fire’—and in a moment the flames had seized him more fiercely than ever. It was the first time he had seen his mistress for four months. He found her kind, and from that hour was utterly passion’s slave again. In the solitude of his London lodging he found that he

could not work nor rest nor fix his thoughts. He must send her a line, he writes to Fanny Brawne two days later, "and see if that will assist in dismissing you from my mind for ever so short a time. Upon my soul I can think of nothing else....I cannot exist without you. I am forgetful of everything but seeing you again—my life seems to stop there—I see no further. You have absorb'd me." A three days' visit at her mother's house, followed by another of a day or two at the Dilkes', ended in his giving up all resistance to the spell. Within ten days, apparently, of his return from Winchester, he had settled again at Hampstead under Brown's roof, next door to the home of his joy and torment. He writes with a true foreboding: "I shall be able to do nothing. I should like to cast the die for Love or Death.—I have no patience with anything else."

It was for death that the die was cast, and from the date of his return to Wentworth Place in October, 1819, begins the melancholy closing chapter of Keats's history. Of the triple flame which was burning away his life, the flame of genius, of passion, and of disease, while the last kept smouldering in secret, the second burnt every day more fiercely, and the first began from this time forth to sink. Not that he was idle during the ensuing season of autumn and early winter; but the work he did was marked both by infirmity of purpose and failure of power. For the present he determined not to publish *Lamia*, *Isabella*, and the other poems written since *Endymion*. He preferred to await the result of Brown's attempt to get *Otho* brought on the stage, thinking, no doubt justly, that a success in that field would help to win a candid hearing for his poetry. In the meantime

the scoffs of the party critics had brought him so low in estimation that Brown in sending in the play thought it best to withhold his friend's name. The great hope of the authors was that Kean would see an opportunity for himself in the part of Ludolph. In this they were not disappointed: the play was accepted: but Elliston, the manager, proposing to keep it back till the next season or the next but one, Keats and Brown objected to the delay, and about Christmas transferred the offer of their ms. to Covent Garden, where Macready, under Harris's management, was at this time beginning to act the leading parts. It was after a while returned unopened, and with that the whole matter seems to have dropped.

In the meanwhile tragedy was still the goal towards which Keats bent his hopes. "One of my ambitions," he had written to Bailey from Winchester, "is to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting." And now, in a letter to Mr Taylor of Nov. 17, he says that to write a few fine plays is still his greatest ambition, when he does feel ambitious, which is very seldom. The little dramatic skill he may as yet have, however badly it might show in a drama, would, he conceives, be sufficient for a poem; and what he wishes to do next is "to diffuse the colouring of *St Agnes' Eve* throughout a poem in which character and sentiment would be the figures to such drapery." Two or three such poems would be, he thinks, the best *gradus* to the *Parnassum altissimum* of true dramatic writing. Meantime, he is for the moment engaged on a task of a different nature. "As the marvellous is the most enticing, and the surest guarantee of harmonious numbers, I have been endeavouring to persuade myself to untether Fancy, and to let her

manage for herself. I and myself cannot agree about this at all." The piece to which Keats here alludes is evidently the satirical fairy poem of the *Cap and Bells*, on which we know him to have been at this time busy. Writing of the autumn days immediately following their return to Wentworth Place, Brown says:—

"By chance our conversation turned on the idea of a comic faery poem in the Spenser stanza, and I was glad to encourage it. He had not composed many stanzas before he proceeded in it with spirit. It was to be published under the feigned authorship of 'Lucy Vaughan Lloyd,' and to bear the title of the *Cap and Bells*, or, which he preferred, the *Jealousies*. This occupied his mornings pleasantly. He wrote it with the greatest facility; in one instance I remember having copied (for I copied as he wrote) as many as twelve stanzas before dinner¹."

Excellent friend as Brown was to Keats, he was not the most judicious adviser in matters of literature, and the attempt made in the *Cap and Bells* to mingle with the strain of fairy fancy a strain of worldly flippancy and satire was one essentially alien to Keats's nature. As long as health and spirits lasted, he was often full, as we have seen, of pleasantry and nonsense: but his wit was essentially amiable², and he was far too tender-hearted ever to be a satirist. Moreover the spirit of poetry in him was too intense and serious to work hand-in-hand with the spirit of banter, as poetry and banter had gone hand-in-hand in some of the metrical romances of the Italian Renaissance, and again, with unprecedented dexterity and brilliance, in the early

¹ Houghton MSS.

² "He never spoke of any one," says Severn, (Houghton MSS.,) "but by saying something in their favour, and this always so agreeably and cleverly, imitating the manner to increase your favourable impression of the person he was speaking of."

cantos of *Don Juan*. It was partly the influence of the facetious Brown, who was a great student of Pulci and Boiardo, partly that of his own recent Italian studies, and partly the dazzling example of Byron's success, that now induced Keats to make an attempt in the same dual strain. Having already employed the measure most fit for such an attempt, the *ottava rima* of the Italians, in his serious poem of *Isabella*, he now, by what seems an odd technical perversity, adopted for his comic poem the grave Spenserian stanza, with its sustained and involved rhymes and its long-drawn close. Working thus in a vein not truly his own, and hampered moreover by his choice of metre, Keats nevertheless manages his transitions from grave to gay with a light hand, and the movement of the *Cap and Bells* has much of his characteristic suppleness and grace. In other respects the poem is not a success. The story, which appears to have been one of his own and Brown's invention, turned on the perverse loves of a fairy emperor and a fairy princess of the East. The two are unwillingly betrothed, each being meanwhile enamoured of a mortal. The eighty-eight stanzas, which were all that Keats wrote of the poem, only carry us as far as the flight of the emperor Elfinan for England, which takes place at the moment when his affianced bride alights from her aerial journey to his capital. Into the Elfinan part of the story Keats makes it clear that he meant somehow to weave in the same tale which had been in his mind when he began the fragment of *St Mark's Eve* at the beginning of the year,—the tale of an English Bertha living in a minster city and beguiled in some way through the reading of a magic book. With this and other purely fanciful elements of the

story are mixed up satirical allusions to the events of the day. It was in this year, 1819, that the quarrels between the Prince Regent and his wife were drawing to a head: the public mind was full of the subject: and the general sympathy was vehemently aroused on the side of the scandalous lady in opposition to her thrice scandalous husband. The references to these royal quarrels and intrigues in the *Cap and Bells* are general rather than particular, although here and there individual names and characters are glanced at: as when 'Esquire Biancopany' stands manifestly, as Mr Forman has pointed out, for Whitbread. But the social and personal satire of the piece is in truth aimless and weak enough. As Keats had not the heart, so neither had he the worldly experience, for this kind of work; and beside the blaze of the Byronic wit and devilry his raillery seems but child's play. Where the fun is of the purely fanciful and fairy kind, he shows abundance of adroitness and invention, and in passages not humorous is sometimes really himself, his imagination becoming vivid and alert, and his style taking on its own happy light and colour,—but seldom for more than a stanza or half-stanza at a time.

Besides his morning task in Brown's company on the *Cap and Bells*, Keats had other work on hand during this November and December. "In the evenings," writes Brown, "at his own desire, he occupied a separate apartment, and was deeply engaged in re-modelling the fragment of *Hyperion* into the form of a Vision." The result of this attempt, which has been preserved, is of a singular and pathetic interest in Keats's history. We have seen how, in the previous August, he had grown discontented with the style and

diction of *Hyperion*, as being too artificial and Miltonic. Now, in the decline of his powers, he took the poem up again¹, and began to re-write and greatly amplify it; partly, it would seem, through a mere relapse into his old fault of overloading, partly through a desire to give expression to thoughts and feelings which were pressing on his mind. His new plan was to relate the fall of the Titans, not, as before, in direct narrative, but in the form of a vision revealed and interpreted to him by a goddess of the fallen race. The reader remembers how he had broken off his work on *Hyperion* at the point where Mnemosyne is enkindling the brain of Apollo with the inspiration of her ancient wisdom. Following a clue which he had found in a Latin book of mythology he had lately bought², he now identifies this Greek Mnemosyne, the mother of the Muses, with the Roman Moneta; and (being possibly also aware that the temple of Juno Moneta on the Capitol at Rome was not far from that of Saturn) makes his Mnemosyne-Moneta the priestess and guardian of Saturn's temple. His vision takes him first into a grove or garden of delicious fruits, having eaten of which he sinks into a slumber, and awakes to find himself on the floor of a huge primeval temple. Presently a voice, the voice of Moneta, whose form he cannot yet see for the fumes of incense, summons him to climb the steps leading to an image beside which she is offering sacrifice. Obeying her with difficulty, he

¹ See Appendix, p 230.

² *Auctores Mythographi Latini*, ed. Van Staveren, Leyden, 1742. Keats's copy of the book was bought by him in 1819, and passed after his death into the hands first of Brown, and afterwards of Archdeacon Bailey (Houghton MSS.). The passage about Moneta which had wrought in Keats's mind occurs at p. 4, in the notes to Hyginus.

questions her concerning the mysteries of the place, and learns from her, among other knowledge, that he is standing in the temple of Saturn. Then she withdraws the veils from her face, at sight of which he feels an irresistible desire to learn her thoughts; and thereupon finds himself conveyed in a trance by her side to the ancient scene of Saturn's overthrow. 'Deep in the shady sadness of a vale,' &c.,—from this point Keats begins to weave into the new tissue of his *Vision* the text of the original *Hyperion*; with alterations which are in almost all cases for the worse. Neither does the new portion of his work well match the old. Side by side with impressive passages, it contains others where both rhythm and diction flag, and in comparison depends for its beauty far more on single lines and passages, and less on sustained effects. Keats has indeed imagined nothing richer or purer than the feast of fruits at the opening of the *Vision*, and of supernatural presences he has perhaps conjured up none of such melancholy beauty and awe as that of the priestess when she removes her veils. But the especial interest of the poem lies in the light which it throws on the inward distresses of his mind, and on the conception he had by this time come to entertain of the poet's character and lot. When Moneta bids him mount the steps to her side, she warns him that if he fails to do so he is bound to perish utterly where he stands. In fact he all but dies before he reaches the stair, but reviving, ascends and learns from her the meaning of the ordeal:—

"None can usurp this height," returned that shade,
"But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest.
All else who find a haven in the world,

Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days,
 If by a chance into this fane they come,
 Rot on the pavement where thou rottedst half."
 "Are there not thousands in the world," said I,
 Encouraged by the sooth voice of the shade,
 "Who love their fellows even to the death,
 Who feel the giant agony of the world,
 And more, like slaves to poor humanity,
 Labour for mortal good? I sure should see
 Other men here, but I am here alone."
 "Those whom thou spakest of are no visionaries,"
 Rejoin'd that voice; "they are no dreamers weak;
 They seek no wonder but the human face,
 No music but a happy-noted voice:
 They come not here, they have no thought to come;
 And thou art here, for thou art less than they.
 What benefit canst thou do, or all thy tribe,
 To the great world? Thou art a dreaming thing,
 A fever of thyself: think of the earth:
 What bliss, even in hope, is there for thee?
 What haven? Every creature hath its home,
 Every sole man hath days of joy and pain,
 Whether his labours be sublime or low—
 The pain alone, the joy alone, distinct:
 Only the dreamer venoms all his days,
 Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve.
 Therefore, that happiness be somewhat shared,
 Such things as thou art are admitted oft
 Into like gardens thou didst pass erewhile,
 And suffer'd in these temples—"¹.

Tracing the process of Keats's thought through this somewhat obscure imagery,—the poet, he means, is one who to indulge in dreams withdraws himself from the wholesome activities of ordinary men. At first he is lulled to sleep by the sweets of poetry (the fruits of the

¹ Mrs Owen was the first of Keats's critics to call attention to this passage, without, however, understanding the special significance it derives from the date of its composition.

garden): awakening, he finds himself on the floor of a solemn temple, with Mnemosyne, the mother and inspirer of song, enthroned all but inaccessibly above him. If he is a trifier indifferent to the troubles of his fellow men, he is condemned to perish swiftly and be forgotten: he is suffered to approach the goddess, to commune with her and catch her inspiration, only on condition that he shares all those troubles and makes them his own. And even then, his portion is far harder and less honourable than that of common men. In the conception Keats here expresses of the human mission and responsibility of his art there is nothing new. Almost from the first dawning of his ambition, he had looked beyond the mere sweets of poetry towards—

“a nobler life,
Where I may find the agonies, the strife
Of human hearts.”

What is new is the bitterness with which he speaks of the poet's lot even at its best.

“Only the dreamer venoms all his days,
Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve,”

—through what a circle must the spirit of Keats, when this bitter cry broke from him, have travelled since the days, only three years before, when he was never tired of singing by anticipation the joys and glories of the poetic life:—

“These are the living pleasures of the bard,
But richer far posterity's award.
What shall he murmur with his latest breath,
When his proud eye looks through the film of death?”—

His present cry in its bitterness is in truth a cry not so much of the spirit as of the flesh, or rather of the spirit vanquished by the flesh. The wasting of his vital powers

by latent disease was turning all his sensations and emotions into pain—at once darkening the shadow of impending poverty, increasing the natural importunity of ill-boding instincts at his heart, and exasperating into agony the unsatisfied cravings of his passion. In verses at this time addressed, though doubtless not shown, to his mistress, he exclaims once and again in tones like this:—

“Where shall I learn to get my peace again?”—

—“O for some sunny spell
To dissipate the shadows of this hell” :—

or at the conclusion of a piteous sonnet :—

“Yourself—your soul—in pity give me all,
Withhold no atom’s atom or I die,
Or living on perhaps, your wretched thrall,
Forget, in the mist of idle misery,
Life’s purposes,—the palate of the mind
Losing its gust, and my ambition blind.”

That he might win peace by marriage with the object of his passion does not seem to have occurred to Keats as possible in the present state of his fortune. “However selfishly I may feel,” he had written to her some months earlier, “I am sure I could never act selfishly.” The Brawnes on their part were comfortably off, but what his instincts of honour and independence forbade him to ask, hers of tenderness could perhaps hardly be expected to offer. As the autumn wore into winter, Keats’s sufferings, disguise them as he might, could not escape the notice of his affectionate comrade Brown. Without understanding the cause, Brown was not slow to perceive the effect, and to realise how vain were the assurances Keats had given him at Winchester, that the pressure of real troubles would stiffen him against troubles

of imagination, and that he was not and would not allow himself to be unhappy.

"I quickly perceived," writes Brown, "that he was more so than I had feared; his abstraction, his occasional lassitude of mind, and, frequently, his assumed tranquillity of countenance gave me great uneasiness. He was unwilling to speak on the subject; and I could do no more than attempt, indirectly, to cheer him with hope, avoiding that word however...All that a friend could say, or offer, or urge, was not enough to heal his many wounds. He listened, and in kindness, or soothed by kindness, showed tranquillity, but nothing from a friend could relieve him, except on a matter of inferior trouble. He was too thoughtful, or too unquiet, and he began to be reckless of health. Among other proofs of recklessness, he was secretly taking, at times, a few drops of laudanum to keep up his spirits. It was discovered by accident, and without delay, revealed to me. He needed not to be warned of the danger of such a habit; but I rejoiced at his promise never to take another drop without my knowledge; for nothing could induce him to break his word when once given,—which was a difficulty. Still, at the very moment of my being rejoiced, this was an additional proof of his rooted misery"¹.

Some of the same symptoms were observed by Haydon, and have been described by him with his usual reckless exaggeration, and love of contrasting another's weakness with his own strength². To his friends in general Keats bore himself as affectionately as ever, but they began to notice that he had lost his cheerfulness. One of them, Severn, at this time competed for and carried off (December 9, 1819) the annual gold medal of the Academy for a historical painting, which had not been adjudged for several years. The subject was Spenser's 'Cave of Despair.' We hear of Keats flinging

¹ Houghton MSS.

² See below, p. 193, note 2.

out in anger from among a company of elder artists where the deserts of the winner were disparaged; and we find him making an appointment with Severn to go and see his prize picture,—adding, however, parenthetically from his troubled heart, “You had best put me into your Cave of Despair.” In December his letters to his sister make mention several times of ill health, and once of a suggestion which had been made to him by Mr Abbey, and which for a moment he was willing to entertain, that he should take advantage of an opening in the tea-broking line in connection with that gentleman’s business. Early in January, 1820, George Keats appeared on a short visit to London. He was now settled with his wife and child in the far West, at Louisville on the Ohio. Here his first trading adventure had failed, owing, as he believed, to the dishonesty of the naturalist Audubon who was concerned in it; and he was brought to England by the necessity of getting possession, from the reluctant Abbey, of a further portion of the scanty funds still remaining to the brothers from their grandmother’s gift. His visit lasted only three weeks, during which John made no attempt to unbosom himself to him as of old. “He was not the same being, wrote George, looking back on the time some years afterwards; “although his reception of me was as warm as heart could wish, he did not speak with his former openness and unreserve, he had lost the reviving custom of venting his griefs.” In a letter which the poet wrote to his sister-in-law while her husband was in England, he attempts to keep up the old vein of lively affectionate fun and spirits, but soon falls involuntarily into one of depression and irritation against the world. Of his work he says nothing, and it is clear from Brown’s

live that both his morning and his evening task—*Cap and Bells* and the *Vision*—had been dropped time before this¹, and left in the fragmentary state which we possess them.

George left for Liverpool on Friday Jan. 28. A few days later Keats was seized by the first overt attack of fatal mischief which had been set up in his constitution by the exertions of his Scotch tour, and which violent agitations, and perhaps imprudences, had aggravated.

"One night," writes Brown—it was on the Thursday b. 3—"at eleven o'clock, he came into the house in a state that looked like fierce intoxication. Such a state in him, I knew, was impossible²; it therefore was the more fearful. I asked hurriedly, 'What is the matter? you are fevered?' 'Yes, yes,' he answered, 'I was on the outside of the stage this bitter day till I was severely chilled,—but now I don't feel it. Fevered!—of course, a little.' He mildly and instantly yielded, a property in his nature towards any friend, to my request that he should go to bed. I followed with the best immediate remedy in my power. I entered his chamber as he leapt into bed. On entering the cold sheets, before his head was on the pillow, he slightly coughed, and I heard him say,—'That is blood from my mouth.' I went towards him; he was examining a single drop of blood upon the sheet. 'Bring me the candle, Brown, and let me see this blood.' After regarding it steadfastly, he looked up in my face, with a calmness of countenance that I can never forget, and said,—'I know the colour of that blood;—it is arterial blood;—I cannot be deceived in that colour;—that drop of blood is my death-warrant;—I must die.' I ran for a surgeon; my friend was bled; and, at five in the morning, I left him after he had been some time in a quiet sleep."

¹ "Interrupted," says Brown oracularly in Houghton MSS., "by a circumstance which it is needless to mention."

² This passing phrase of Brown, who lived with Keats in the closest daily companionship, by itself sufficiently refutes certain statements of Haydon. But see Appendix, p. 232.

Keats knew his case, and from the first moment had foreseen the issue truly. He survived for twelve months longer, but the remainder of his life was but a life-in-death. How many are there among us to whom such *lacrymas rerum* come not home? Happy at least are they whose lives this curse consumption has not darkened with sorrow unquenchable for losses past, with apprehensions never at rest for those to come,—who know not what it is to watch, in some haven of delusive hope, under Mediterranean palms, or amid the glittering winter peace of Alpine snows, their dearest and their brightest perish. The malady in Keats's case ran through the usual phases of deceptive rally and inevitable relapse. The doctors would not admit that his lungs were injured, and merely prescribed a lowering regimen and rest from mental excitement. The weakness and nervous prostration of the patient were at first excessive, and he could bear to see nobody but Brown, who nursed him affectionately day and night. After a week or so he was able to receive little daily visits from his betrothed, and to keep up a constant interchange of notes with her. A hint, which his good feelings wrung from him, that under the circumstances he ought to release her from her engagement, was not accepted, and for a time he became quieter and more composed. To his sister at Walthamstow he wrote often and cheerfully from his sickbed, and pleasant letters to some of his men friends: among them one to James Rice, which contains this often quoted and touching picture of his state of mind:—

“I may say that for six months before I was taken ill I had not passed a tranquil day. Either that gloom overspread me, or I was suffering under some passionate feeling, or if I turned to versify that acerbated the poison of either sensation.

The beauties of nature had lost their power over me. How astonishingly (here I must premise that illness, as far as I can judge in so short a time, has relieved my mind of a load of deceptive thoughts and images, and makes me perceive things in a truer light),—how astonishingly does the chance of leaving the world impress a sense of its natural beauties upon us! Like poor Falstaff, though I do not ‘babble,’ I think of green fields; I muse with the greatest affection on every flower I have known from my infancy—their shapes and colours are as new to me as if I had just created them with a super-human fancy.”

The greatest pleasure he had experienced in life, Keats said at another time, was in watching the growth of flowers: and in a discussion on the literary merits of the Bible he once, says Hazlitt, found fault with the Hebrew poetry for saying so little about them. What he wants to see again, he writes now further from his sickbed, are ‘the simple flowers of our spring.’ And in the course of April, after being nearly two months a prisoner, he began gradually to pick up strength and get about. Even as early as the twenty-fifth of March, we hear of him going into London, to the private view of Haydon’s ‘Entry into Jerusalem,’ where the painter tells how he found him and Hazlitt in a corner, ‘really rejoicing.’ Keats’s friends, in whose minds his image had always been associated with the ideas of intense vitality and of fame in store, could not bring themselves to believe but that he would recover. Brown had arranged to start early in May on a second walking-tour in Scotland, and the doctor actually advised Keats to go with him: a folly on which he knew his own state too well to venture. He went with Brown on the smack as far as Gravesend, and then returned; not to Hampstead, but to a lodging in Wesleyan Place, Kentish Town. He had chosen this neighbourhood for the sake of the

companionship of Leigh Hunt, who was living in Mortimer Street close by. Keats remained at Wesleyan Place for about seven weeks during May and June, living an invalid life, and occasionally taking advantage of the weather to go to an exhibition in London or for a drive on Hampstead Heath. During the first weeks of his illness he had been strictly enjoined to avoid not only the excitement of writing, but even that of reading, poetry. About this time he speaks of intending to begin (meaning begin again) soon on the *Cap and Bells*. But in fact the only work he really did was that of seeing through the press, with some slight revision of the text, the new volume of poems which his friends had at last induced him to put forward. This is the immortal volume containing *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St Agnes*, *Hyperion*, and the *Odes*. Of the poems written during Keats's twenty months of inspiration from March 1818 to October 1819, none of importance are omitted except the *Eve of St Mark*, the *Ode on Indolence*, and *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. The first Keats no doubt thought too fragmentary, and the second too unequal: *La Belle Dame sans Merci* he had let Hunt have for his periodical *The Indicator*, where it was printed (with alterations not for the better) on May 20, 1820. *Hyperion*, as the publishers mention in a note, was only at their special desire included in the book: it is given in its original shape, the poet's friends, says Brown, having made him feel that they thought the re-cast no improvement. The volume came out in the first week of July. An admirably kind and discreet review by Leigh Hunt appeared in the *Indicator* at the beginning of August¹: and in the same month Jeffrey in

¹ A week or two later Leigh Hunt printed in the *Indicator* a few stanzas from the *Cap and Bells*, and about the same time

the *Edinburgh Review* for the first time broke silence in Keats's favour. The impression made on the more intelligent order of readers may be inferred from the remarks of Crabb Robinson in his *Diaries* for the following December¹. "My book has had good success among the literary people," wrote Keats a few weeks after its appearance, "and I believe has a moderate sale."

But had the success been even far greater than it was, Keats was in no heart and no health for it to cheer him. Passion with lack of hope were working havoc in his blood, and frustrating any efforts of nature towards recovery. The relapse was not long delayed. Fresh hæmorrhages occurring on the 22nd and 23rd of June, he moved from his lodgings in Wesleyan Place to be nursed by the Hunts at their house in Mortimer Street. Here everything was done that kindness could suggest to keep him amused and comforted: but all in vain: he "would keep his eyes fixed all day," as he afterwards avowed, on Hampstead; and once when at Hunt's suggestion they took a drive in that direction, and rested on a seat in Well Walk, he burst into a flood of unwonted tears, and declared his heart was breaking. In writing to Fanny Brawne he at times cannot disguise nor control his misery, but breaks into piteous outcries, the complaints of one who feels himself chained and desperate while mistress and friends are free, and whose heart is racked between desire and helplessness, and a thousand daily pangs of half-frantic jealousy and suspicion. "Hamlet's heart was full of such misery as dedicated to Keats his translation of Tasso's *Amyntas*, speaking of the original as "an early work of a celebrated poet whose fate it was to be equally pestered by the critical and admired by the poetical."

¹ See Crabb Robinson, *Diaries*, Vol. II. p. 197, etc.

mine is when he said to Ophelia, 'Go to a nunnery, go, go!'" Keats when he wrote thus was not himself, but only in his own words, 'a fever of himself:' and to seek cause for his complaints in anything but his own distempered state would be unjust equally to his friends and his betrothed. Wound as they might at the time, we know from her own words that they left no impression of unkindness on her memory¹.

Such at this time was Keats's condition that the slightest shock unmanned him, and he could not bear the entrance of an unexpected person or stranger. After he had been some seven weeks with the Hunts, it happened on the 12th of August, through the misconduct of a servant, that a note from Fanny Brawne was delivered to him opened and two days late. This circumstance, we are told, so affected him that he could not endure to stay longer in the house, but left it instantly, intending to go back to his old lodgings in Well Walk. The Brawnes, however, would not suffer this, but took him into their own home and nursed him. Under the eye and tendance of his betrothed, he found during the next few weeks some mitigation of his sufferings. Haydon came one day to see him, and has told, with a painter's touch, how he found him "lying in a white bed, with white quilt, and white sheets, the only colour visible was the hectic flush of his cheeks. He was deeply affected and so was I²." Ever since his relapse at the end of June, Keats had been warned by the doctors that a winter in England would be too much for

¹ See Appendix, p. 233.

² Houghton MSS. In both the *Autobiography* and the *Correspondence* the passage is amplified with painful and probably not trustworthy additions.

him, and had been trying to bring himself to face the prospect of a journey to Italy. The Shelleys had heard through the Gisbornes of Keats's relapse, and Shelley now wrote in terms of the most delicate and sympathetic kindness inviting him to come and take up his residence with them at Pisa. This letter reached Keats immediately after his return to Hampstead. He replied in an uncertain tone, showing himself deeply touched by the Shelleys' friendship, but as to the *Cenci*, which had just been sent him, and generally as to Shelley's and his own work in poetry, finding nothing very cordial or much to the purpose to say.

As to the plan of wintering in Italy, Keats had by this time made up his mind to try it, "as a soldier marches up to a battery." His hope was that Brown would accompany him, but the letters he had written to that friend in the Highlands were delayed in delivery, and the time for Keats's departure was fast approaching while Brown still remained in ignorance of his purpose. In the meantime another companion offered himself in the person of Severn, who having won, as we have seen, the gold medal of the Royal Academy the year before, determined now to go and work at Rome with a view to competing for the travelling studentship. Keats and Severn accordingly took passage for Naples on board the ship 'Maria Crowther,' which sailed from London on Sept. 18¹. Several of the friends who loved Keats best went on board with him as far as Gravesend, and among

¹ I have the date of sailing from Lloyd's, through the kindness of the secretary, Col. Hozier. For the particulars of the voyage and the time following it, I have drawn in almost equal degrees from the materials published by Lord Houghton, by Mr Forman, by Severn himself in *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. xi. p. 401, and from the unpublished Houghton and Severn MSS.

them Mr Taylor, who had just helped him with money for his journey by the purchase for £100 of the copy-right of *Endymion*. As soon as the ill news of his health reached Brown in Scotland, he hastened to make the best of his way south, and for that purpose caught a smack at Dundee, which arrived in the Thames on the same evening as the 'Maria Crowther' sailed: so that the two friends lay on that night within hail of one another off Gravesend unawares.

The voyage at first seemed to do Keats good, and Severn was struck by his vigour of appetite and apparent cheerfulness. The fever of travel and change is apt to produce this deceptive effect in a consumptive patient, and in Keats's case, aided by his invincible spirit of pleasantness to those about him, it was sufficient to disguise his sufferings, and to raise the hopes of his companion throughout the voyage and for some time afterwards. Contrary winds held them beating about the Channel, and ten days after starting they had got no farther than Portsmouth, where Keats landed for a day, and paid a visit to his friends at Bedhampton. On board ship in the Solent immediately afterwards he wrote to Brown a letter confiding to him the secret of his torments more fully than he had ever confided it face to face. Even if his body would recover of itself, his passion, he says would prevent it. "The very thing which I want to live most for will be a great occasion of my death. I cannot help it. Who can help it? Were I in health it would make me ill, and how can I bear it in my state? I wish for death every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even these pains, which are better than nothing. Land and sea,

weakness and decline, are great separators, but Death is the great divorcer for ever."

On the night when Keats wrote these words (Sept. 28) Brown was staying with the Dilkes at Chichester, so that the two friends had thus narrowly missed seeing each other once more. The ship putting to sea again, still with adverse winds, there came next to Keats that day of momentary calm and lightening of the spirit of which Severn has left us the record, and the poet himself a testimony in the last and one of the most beautiful of his sonnets. They landed on the Dorsetshire coast, apparently near Lulworth, and spent a day exploring its rocks and caves, the beauties of which Keats showed and interpreted with the delighted insight of one initiated from birth into the secrets of nature. On board ship the same night he wrote the sonnet which every reader of English knows so well; placing it, by a pathetic choice or chance, opposite the heading a *Lover's Complaint*, on a blank leaf of the folio copy of Shakespeare's poems which had been given him by Reynolds, and which in marks, notes, and under-scorings bears so many other interesting traces of his thought and feeling:—

"Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art,
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of cold ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death."

These were Keats's last verses. With the single exception of the sonnet beginning 'The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone,' composed probably immediately after his return from Winchester, they are the only love-verses in which his passion is attuned to tranquillity; and surely no death-song of lover or poet came ever in a strain of more unfevered beauty and tenderness, or with images of such a refreshing and solemn purity.

Getting clear of the Channel at last, the vessel was caught by a violent storm in the Bay of Biscay; and Severn waking at night, and finding the water rushing through their cabin, called out to Keats "half fearing he might be dead," and to his relief was answered cheerfully with the first line of Arne's long-popular song from *Artaxerxes*—'Water parted from the sea.' As the storm abated Keats began to read the shipwreck canto of *Don Juan*, but found its reckless and cynic brilliancy intolerable, and presently flung the volume from him in disgust. A dead calm followed: after which the voyage proceeded without farther incident, except the dropping of a shot across the ship's bow by a Portuguese man-of-war, in order to bring her to and ask a question about privateers. After a voyage of over four weeks, the 'Maria Crowther' arrived in the Bay of Naples, and was there subjected to ten days' quarantine; during which, says Keats, he summoned up, 'in a kind of desperation,' more puns than in the whole course of his life before. A Miss Cotterill, consumptive like himself, was among his fellow-passengers, and to her Keats showed himself full of cheerful kindness from first to last, the sight of her sufferings inwardly preying all the while on his nerves, and contributing to aggravate his own. He admits as much in writing from Naples har-

bour to Mrs Brawne: and in the same letter says, "O what an account I could give you of the Bay of Naples if I could once more feel myself a Citizen of this world—I feel a spirit in my Brain would lay it forth pleasantly." The effort he constantly made to keep bright, and to show an interest in the new world of colour and classic beauty about him, partly imposed on Severn; but in a letter he wrote to Brown from Naples on Nov. 1, soon after their landing, his secret anguish of sense and spirit breaks out terribly:—

"I can bear to die—I cannot bear to leave her...Oh God! God! God! Everything I have in my trunks that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear. The silk lining she put in my travelling cap scalds my head. My imagination is horribly vivid about her—I see her—I hear her...Oh Brown, I have coals of fire in my breast. It surprises me that the human heart is capable of so much misery."

At Naples Keats and Severn stayed at the Hotel d'Angleterre, and received much kindness and hospitality from a brother of Miss Cotterill's who was there to meet her. The political state and servile temper of the people—though they were living just then under the constitutional forms imposed on the Bourbon monarchy by the revolution of the previous summer—grated on Keats's liberal instincts, and it was the sight, in the theatre, of sentries actually posted on the stage during a performance that one evening determined him suddenly to leave the place. He had received there another letter from Shelley, who since he last wrote had read the *Lamia* volume, and was full of generous admiration for *Hyperion*. Shelley now warmly renewed his invitation to Keats to come to Pisa. But his and Severn's plans were fixed for Rome. On their drive thither (apparently

in the second week of November) Keats suffered seriously from want of proper food : but he was able to take pleasure in the beauty of the land, and of the autumn flowers which Severn gathered for him by the way. Reaching Rome, they settled at once in lodgings which Dr (afterwards Sir James) Clark had taken for them in the Piazza di Spagna, in the first house on the right going up the steps to Sta Trinità dei Monti. Here, according to the manner of those days in Italy, they were left pretty much to shift for themselves. Neither could speak Italian, and at first they were ill served by the *trattoria* from which they got their meals, until Keats mended matters by one day coolly emptying all the dishes out of window, and handing them back to the messenger ; a hint, says Severn, which was quickly taken. One of Severn's first cares was to get a piano, since nothing soothed Keats's pain so much as music. For a while the patient seemed better. Dr Clark wished him to avoid the excitement of seeing the famous monuments of the city, so he left Severn to visit these alone, and contented himself with quiet strolls, chiefly on the Pincian close by. The season was fine, and the freshness and brightness of the air, says Severn, invariably made him pleasant and witty. In Severn's absence Keats had a companion he liked in an invalid Lieutenant Elton. In their walks on the Pincian these two often met the famous beauty Pauline Bonaparte, Princess Borghese. Her charms were by this time failing—but not for lack of exercise ; and her melting glances at his companion, who was tall and handsome, presently affected Keats's nerves, and made them change the direction of their walks. Sometimes, instead of walking, they would ride a little way on horseback while Severn was working among the ruins.

It is related by Severn that Keats in his first days at Rome began reading a volume of Alfieri, but dropped it at the words, too sadly applicable to himself :—

“Misera me ! sollievo a me non resta
Altro che 'l pianto, *ed il pianto è delitto.*”

Notwithstanding signs like this, his mood was on the whole more cheerful. His thoughts even turned again towards verse, and he meditated a poem on the subject of Sabrina. Severn began to believe he would get well, and wrote encouragingly to his friends in England ; and on Nov. 30 Keats himself wrote to Brown in a strain much less despondent than before. But suddenly on these glimmerings of hope followed despair. On Dec. 10 came a relapse which left no doubt of the issue. Hæmorrhage followed hæmorrhage on successive days, and then came a period of violent fever, with scenes the most piteous and distressing. Keats at starting had confided to his friend a bottle of laudanum, and now with agonies of entreaty begged to have it, in order that he might put an end to his misery : and on Severn's refusal, “his tender appeal turned to despair, with all the power of his ardent imagination and bursting heart.” It was no unmanly fear of pain in Keats, Severn again and again insists, that prompted this appeal, but above all his acute sympathetic sense of the trials which the sequel would bring upon his friend. “He explained to me the exact procedure of his gradual dissolution, enumerated my deprivations and toils, and dwelt upon the danger to my life and certainly to my fortune of my continued attendance on him.” Severn gently persisting in refusal, Keats for a while fiercely refused his friend's ministrations, until presently the example of that friend's

patience and his own better mind made him ashamed. In religion Keats had been neither a believer nor a scoffer, respecting Christianity without calling himself a Christian, and by turns clinging to and drifting from the doctrine of immortality. Contrasting now the behaviour of the believer Severn with his own, he acknowledged anew the power of the Christian teaching and example, and bidding Severn read to him from Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying*, strove to pass the remainder of his days in a temper of more peace and constancy.

By degrees the tumult of his soul abated. His sufferings were very great, partly from the nature of the disease itself, partly from the effect of the disastrous lowering and starving treatment at that day employed to combat it. Shunned and neglected as the sick and their companions then were in Italy, the friends had no succour except from the assiduous kindness of Dr and Mrs Clark, with occasional aid from a stranger, Mr Ewing. At one moment, their stock of money having run out, they were in danger of actual destitution, till a remittance from Mr Taylor arrived just in time to save them. The devotion and resource of Severn were infinite, and had their reward. Occasionally there came times of delirium or half-delirium, when the dying man would rave wildly of his miseries and his ruined hopes, till his companion was almost exhausted with "beating about in the tempest of his mind;" and once and again some fresh remembrance of his love, or the sight of her handwriting in a letter, would pierce him with too intolerable a pang. But generally, after the first few weeks, he lay quiet, with his hand clasped on a white cornelian, one of the little tokens she had given him at starting, while his companion soothed him with reading or music. His favourite

reading was still Jeremy Taylor, and the sonatas of Haydn were the music he liked Severn best to play to him. Of recovery he would not hear, but longed for nothing except the peace of death, and had even weaned, or all but weaned, himself from thoughts of fame. "I feel," he said, "the flowers growing over me," and it seems to have been gently and without bitterness that he gave the words for his epitaph:—"here lies one whose name was writ in water." Ever since his first attack at Wentworth Place he had been used to speak of himself as living a posthumous life, and now his habitual question to the doctor when he came in was, "Doctor, when will this posthumous life of mine come to an end?" As he turned to ask it neither physician nor friend could bear the pathetic expression of his eyes, at all times of extraordinary power, and now burning with a sad and piercing unearthly brightness in his wasted cheeks. Loveable and considerate to the last, "his generous concern for me," says Severn, "in my isolated position at Rome was one of his greatest cares." His response to kindness was irresistibly winning, and the spirit of poetry and pleasantness was with him to the end. Severn tells how in watching Keats he used sometimes to fall asleep, and awakening, find they were in the dark. "To remedy this one night I tried the experiment of fixing a thread from the bottom of a lighted candle to the wick of an unlighted one, that the flame might be conducted, all which I did without telling Keats. When he awoke and found the first candle nearly out, he was reluctant to wake me and while doubting suddenly cried out, 'Severn, Severn, here's a little fairy lamplighter actually lit up the other candle.'" And again "Poor Keats has me ever by him, and

shadows out the form of one solitary friend : he opens his eyes in great doubt and horror, but when they fall on me they close gently, open quietly and close again, till he sinks to sleep."

Such tender and harrowing memories haunted all the after life of the watcher, and in days long subsequent it was one of his chief occupations to write them down. Life held out for two months and a half after the relapse, but from the first days of February the end was visibly drawing near. It came peacefully at last. On the 23rd of that month, writes Severn, "about four, the approaches of death came on. 'Severn—I—lift me up—I am dying—I shall die easy; don't be frightened—be firm, and thank God it has come.' I lifted him up in my arms. The phlegm seemed boiling in his throat, and increased until eleven, when he gradually sank into death, so quiet, that I still thought he slept." Three days later his body was carried, attended by several of the English in Rome who had heard his story, to its grave in that retired and verdant cemetery which for his sake and Shelley's has become a place of pilgrimage to the English race for ever. It was but the other day that the remains of Severn were laid in their last resting-place beside his friend¹.

¹ Severn, as most readers will remember, died at Rome in 1879, and his remains were in 1882 removed from their original burying-place to a grave beside those of Keats in the Protestant cemetery near the pyramid of Gaius Cestius.

CHAPTER IX.

Character and Genius.

THE touching circumstances of Keats's illness and death at Rome aroused naturally, as soon as they were known, the sympathy of every generous mind. Foremost, as all the world knows, in the expression of that sympathy was Shelley. He had been misinformed as to the degree in which the critics had contributed to Keats's sufferings, and believing that they had killed him, was full both of righteous wrath against the offenders, and of passionate regret for what the world had lost. Under the stress of that double inspiration Shelley wrote,—

“And a whirlwind of music came sweet from the spheres.”

As an utterance of abstract pity and indignation, *Adonais* is unsurpassed in literature: with its hurrying train of beautiful spectral images, and the irresistible current and thrilling modulation of its verse, it is perhaps the most perfect and sympathetic effort of Shelley's art: while its strain of transcendental consolation for mortal loss contains the most lucid exposition of his philosophy. But of Keats as he actually lived the elegy presents no feature, while the general impression it conveys of his character and fate is erroneous. A similar false impression was at the same time conveyed, to a circle of readers

incommensurably wider than that reached by Shelley, in the well-known stanza of *Don Juan*. In regard to Keats Byron tried both to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare. When the *Edinburgh* praised him, he was furious, and on receipt of the *Lamia* volume wrote with vulgar savagery to Murray:—"No more Keats, I entreat:—flay him alive;—if some of you don't, I must skin him myself." Then after his death, hearing that it had been caused by the critics, he turns against the latter, and cries:—"I would not be the person who wrote that homicidal article for all the honour and glory of the world." In the *Don Juan* passage he contrived to have his fling at the reviewers and at the weakness, as he imagined it, of their victim in the same breath.

Taken together with the notion of 'Johnny Keats' to which *Blackwood* and the *Quarterly* had previously given currency, the *Adonais* and the *Don Juan* passage alike tended to fix in the public mind an impression of Keats's character as that of a weakling to whom the breath of detraction had been poison. It was long before his friends, who knew that he was 'as like Johnny Keats as the Holy Ghost,' did anything effectual to set his memory right. Brown had been bent on doing so from the first, but in the end wrote only the brief memoir, still in manuscript, which has been quoted so often in the above pages. For anything like a full biography George Keats in America could alone have supplied the information; but against him, since he had failed to send help to his poet-brother in the hour of need, (having been in truth simply unable to do so,) Brown had unluckily conceived so harsh a prejudice that friendly communication between them became impossible. Neither was Dilke, who alone among Keats's friends in England took

George's part, disposed under the circumstances to help Brown in his task. For a long time George himself hoped to superintend and supply materials for a life of his brother, but partly his want of literary experience, and partly the difficulty of leaving his occupations in the West, prevented him. Mr Taylor, the publisher, also at one time wished to be Keats's biographer, and with the help of Woodhouse collected materials for the purpose; but in the end failed to use them. The same wish was entertained by John Hamilton Reynolds, whose literary skill, and fine judgment and delicacy, should have made him of all the poet's friends the most competent for the work. But of these many projects not one had been carried out, when five-and-twenty years after Keats's death a younger man, who had never seen him, took up the task,—the Monckton Milnes of those days, the Lord Houghton freshly remembered by us all,—and with help from nearly all Keats's surviving friends, and by the grace of his own genial and sympathetic temper, set the memory of the poet in its true light in the beautiful and moving book with which every student is familiar.

Keats had indeed enemies within his house, apart (if the separation can with truth be made) from the secret presence of that worst enemy of all, inherited disease, which killed him. He had a nature all tingling with pride and sensitiveness: he had the perilous capacity and appetite for pleasure to which he owns when he speaks of his own 'exquisite sense of the luxurious': and with it the besetting tendency to self-torment which he describes as his 'horrid morbidity of temperament.' The greater his credit that on the one hand he gave way so little to self-indulgence, and that on the other he battled so bravely with the spirits that plagued him.

To the bridle thus put on himself he alludes in his unaffected way when he speaks of the 'violence of his temperament, continually smothered up.' Left fatherless at eight, motherless at fifteen, and subject, during the forming years of his life which followed, to no other discipline but that of apprenticeship in a suburban surgery, he showed in his life such generosity, modesty, humour, and self-knowledge, such a spirit of conduct and degree of self-control, as would have done honour to one infinitely better trained and less hardly tried. His hold over himself gave way, indeed, under the stress of passion, and as a lover he betrays all the weak places of his nature. But we must remember his state of health when the passion seized, and the worse state into which it quickly threw, him, as well as the lack there was in her who caused it,—not indeed, so far as we can judge, of kindness and loyalty, but certainly, it would seem, of the woman's finer genius of tact and tenderness. Under another kind of trial, when the work he offered to the world, in all soberness of self-judgment and of hope, was thrust back upon him with gibes and insult, he bore himself with true dignity: and if the practical consequences preyed upon his mind, it was not more than reason and the state of his fortunes justified.

In all ordinary relations of life, his character was conspicuous alike for manly spirit and sweetness. No man who ever lived has inspired in his friends a deeper or more devoted affection. One, of whose name we have heard little in this history¹, wrote while the poet lay dying: "Keats must get himself again, Severn, if but for me—I cannot afford to lose him: if I know what it is to love I truly love John Keats." The following is from a letter of

¹ Haslam, in *Severn MSS.*

Brown written also during his illness:—"he is present to me every where and at all times,—he now seems sitting here at my side, and looking hard into my face.... So much as I have loved him, I never knew how closely he was wound about my heart¹." Elsewhere, speaking of the time of his first attack, Brown says:—"while I waited on him his instinctive generosity, his acceptance of my offices, by a glance of his eye, or motion of his hand, made me regard my mechanical duty as absolutely nothing compared to his silent acknowledgment. Something like this, Severn his last nurse, observed to me²:" and we know in fact how the whole life of Severn, prolonged nearly sixty years after his friend's death, was coloured by the light reflected from his memory. When Lord Houghton's book came out in 1848, Archdeacon Bailey wrote from Ceylon to thank the writer for doing merited honour to one "whose genius I did not, and do not, more fully admire than I entirely loved the *Man*." The points on which all who knew him especially dwell are two. First his high good sense and spirit of honour; as to which let one witness stand for many. "He had a soul of noble integrity," says Bailey: "and his common sense was a conspicuous part of his character. Indeed his character was, in the best sense, manly." Next, his beautiful unselfishness and warmth of sympathy. This is the rarest quality of genius, which from the very intensity of its own life and occupations is apt to be self-absorbed, requiting the devotion it receives with charm, which costs it nothing,—but with charm only, and when the trial comes, refusing to friendship any real sacrifice of its own objects or inclinations. But when genius to charm adds true unselfishness, and is ready to throw all

¹ Severn MSS.² Houghton MSS.³ *Ibid.*

the ardour of its own life into the cares and interests of those about it, then we have what in human nature is most worthy of love. And this is what his companions found in Keats. "He was the sincerest friend," cries Reynolds, "the most loveable associate,—the deepest listener to the griefs and distresses of all around him,—'That ever lived in this tide of times!'" To the same effect Haydon:—"He was the most unselfish of human creatures: unadapted to this world, he cared not for himself, and put himself to any inconvenience for the sake of his friends....He had a kind gentle heart, and would have shared his fortune with any one who wanted it." And again Bailey:—

"With his friends, a sweeter tempered man I never knew, than was John Keats. Gentleness was indeed his proper characteristic, without one particle of dullness, or insipidity, or want of spirit....In his letters he talks of *suspecting* everybody. It appeared not in his conversation. On the contrary he was uniformly the apologist for poor frail human nature, and allowed for people's faults more than any man I ever knew, and especially for the faults of his friends. But if any act of wrong or oppression, of fraud or falsehood, was the topic, he rose into sudden and animated indignation¹."

Lastly, "he had no fears of self," says George Keats, "through interference in the quarrels of others, he would at all hazards, and without calculating his powers to defend, or his reward for the deed, defend the oppressed and distressed with heart and soul, with hand and purse."

In this chorus of admiring affection, Haydon alone must assert his own superiority by mixing depreciation with praise. When he laments over Keats's dissipations, he exaggerates, there is evidence enough to show, idly and calumniously. When on the other hand he speaks

¹ Houghton MSS.

² *Ibid.*

of the poet's "want of decision of character and power of will," and says that "never for two days did he know his own intentions," his criticism is deserving of more attention. This is only Haydon's way of describing a fact in Keats's nature of which no one was better aware than himself. He acknowledges his own "unsteady and vagarish disposition." What he means is no weakness of instinct or principle affecting the springs of conduct in regard to others, but a liability to veerings of opinion and purpose in regard to himself. "The Celtic instability," a reader may perhaps surmise who adopts that hypothesis as to the poet's descent. Whether the quality was one of race or not, it was probably inseparable from the peculiar complexion of Keats's genius. Or rather it was an expression in character of that which was the very essence of that genius, the predominance, namely, of the sympathetic imagination over every other faculty. Acute as was his own emotional life, he nevertheless belonged essentially to the order of poets whose work is inspired, not mainly by their own personality, but by the world of things and men outside them. He realised clearly the nature of his own gift, and the degree to which susceptibility to external impressions was apt to overpower in him, not practical consistency only, but even the sense of a personal identity.

"As to the poetic character itself," he writes, "(I mean that sort, of which, if I am anything, I am a member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian, or egotistical sublime; which is a thing *per se*, and stands alone), it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing—it has no character—it enjoys light and shade—it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated,—it has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence,

because he has no identity; he is continually in for, and filling, some other body....If then, he has no self, and if I am a poet, where is the wonder that I should say I would write no more? Might I not at that very instant have been cogitating on the characters of Saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess, but it is a very fact, that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature."

"Even now," he says on another occasion, "I am perhaps not speaking from myself, but from some character in whose soul I now live." Keats was often impatient of this Protean quality of his own mind. "I would call the head and top of those who have a proper self," he says, "men of power": and it is the men of power, the men of trenchant individuality and settled aims, that in the sphere of practical life he most admires. But in the sphere of thought and imagination his preference is dictated by the instinctive bent of his own genius. In that sphere he is impatient, in turn, of all intellectual narrowness, and will not allow that poetry should make itself the exponent of any single creed or given philosophy. Thus in speaking of what he thinks too doctrinal and pedagogic in the work of Wordsworth:—

"For the sake," he asks, "of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain philosophy engendered in the whims of an egotist? Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself. Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his half-seeing.... We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us, and, if we do not agree, seems to put its hand into its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul."

This is but one of many passages in which Keats

proclaims the necessity, for a poet, of an all-embracing receptivity and openness of mind. His critics sometimes speak as if his aim had been merely to create a paradise of art and beauty remote from the cares and interests of the world. If the foregoing pages have been written to any purpose, the reader will be aware that no criticism can be more mistaken. At the creation, the revelation, of beauty Keats aimed indeed invariably, but of beauty wherever its elements existed:—"I have loved," as he says, "the principle of beauty in all things." His conception of the kingdom of poetry was Shakspearean, including the whole range of life and imagination, every affection of the soul and every speculation of the mind. Of that kingdom he lived long enough to enter on and possess certain provinces only, those that by their manifest and prevailing charm first and most naturally allure the spirit of youth. Would he have been able to make the rest also his own? Would the faculties that were so swift to reveal the hidden delights of nature, to divine the true spirit of antiquity, to conjure with the spell of the Middle Age,—would they with time have gained equal power to unlock the mysteries of the heart, and, still in obedience to the law of beauty, to illuminate and harmonize the great struggles and problems of human life?

My belief is that such power they would not have failed to gain. From the height to which the genius of Keats arose during the brief period between its first effervescence and its exhaustion,—from the glowing humanity of his own nature, and the completeness with which, by the testimony alike of his own consciousness and his friends' experience, he was accustomed to live in the lives of others,—from the gleams of true greatness of mind which shine not only in his poetry, but equally amid the

gossip and pleasantry of his familiar letters,—from all our evidences, in a word, as to what he was as well as from what he did,—I think it probable that by power, as well as by temperament and aim, he was the most Shakspearean spirit that has lived since Shakspeare; the true Marcellus, as his first biographer has called him, of the realm of English song; and that in his premature death our literature has sustained its greatest loss. Something like this, it would seem, is also the opinion of his foremost now living successors, as Lord Tennyson, Mr Browning, Mr Matthew Arnold. Others have formed a different judgment: but among those unfortunate guests at the banquet of life, the poets called away before their time, who can really adjudge the honours that would have been due had they remained? In a final estimate of any writer's work, we must take into account not what he might have done, but only what he did. And in the work actually left by Keats, the master-chord of humanity, we shall admit, had not yet been struck with fulness. When we sum up in our minds the total effect of his poetry, we can think, indeed, of the pathos of *Isabella*, but of that alone, as equally powerful in its kind with the nature-magic of the *Hymn to Pan* and the *Ode to a Nightingale*, with the glow of romance colour in *St Agnes' Eve*, the weirdness of romance sentiment in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, the conflict of elemental force with fate in *Hyperion*, the revelations of the soul of ancient life and art in the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and the fragment of an *Ode to Maia*.

It remains to glance at the influence exercised by Keats on the poets who have come after him. In two ways chiefly, I should say, has that influence been operative. First on the subject-matter of poetry, in kindling

and informing in other souls the poetic love of nature for her own sake, and also, in equal degrees, the love both of classic fable and of romance. And secondly on its form, in setting before poets a certain standard of execution—a standard not of technical correctness, for which Keats never cared sufficiently, but of that quality to which he himself refers when he speaks of ‘loading every rift of a subject with ore.’ We may define it as the endeavour after a continual positive poetic richness and felicity of phrase. A typical instance is to be found in the lines already quoted that tell us of the trembling hopes of Madeline,—

“But to her heart her heart was voluble,
Paining with eloquence her balmy side.”

The beauty of such a phrase is no mere beauty of fancy or of sound; it is the beauty which resides in truth only, every word being chosen and every touch laid by a vital exercise of the imagination. The first line describes in perfection the duality of consciousness in such a moment of suspense, the second makes us realise at once the physical effect of the emotion on the heroine, and the spell of her imagined presence on ourselves. In so far as Keats has taught other poets really to write like this, his influence has been wholly to their advantage,—but not so when for this quality they give us only its simulacrum, in the shape of brilliancies merely verbal and a glitter not of gold. The first considerable writer among Keats’s successors on whom his example took effect was Hood, in the fairy and romance poems of his earlier time. The dominant poet of the Victorian age, Tennyson, has been profoundly influenced by it both in the form and the matter of his art, and is indeed the heir of Keats and of Wordsworth in almost equal degrees. After or together with Coleridge, Keats has

also contributed most, among English writers, to the poetic method and ideals of Rossetti and his group. Himself, as we have seen, alike by gifts and training a true child of the Elizabethans, he thus stands in the most direct line of descent between the great poets of that age and those, whom posterity has yet to estimate, of our own day.

Such, I think, is Keats's historic place in English literature. What his place was in the hearts of those who best knew him, we have just learned from their own lips. The days of the years of his life were few and evil, but above his grave the double aureole of poetry and friendship shines immortally.

THE END.

APPENDIX.

p. 2, note 1. As to the exact date of Keats's birth the evidence is conflicting. He was christened at St Botolph's, Bishopsgate, Dec. 18, 1795, and on the margin of the entry in the baptismal register (which I am informed is in the handwriting of the rector, Dr Couybeare) is a note stating that he was born Oct. 31. The date is given accordingly without question by Mr Buxton Forman (*Works*, vol. 1. p. xlviii). But it seems certain that Keats himself and his family believed his birthday to have been Oct. 29. Writing on that day in 1818, Keats says, "this is my birthday." Brown (in Houghton MSS.) gives the same day, but only as on hearsay from a lady to whom Keats had mentioned it, and with a mistake as to the year. Lastly, in the proceedings in *Rawlings v. Jennings*, Oct. 29 is again given as his birthday, in the affidavit of one Anne Birch, who swears that she knew his father and mother intimately. The entry in the St Botolph's register is probably the authority to be preferred.—Lower Moorfields was the space now occupied by Finsbury Circus and the London Institution, together with the east side of Finsbury Pavement.—The births of the younger brothers are in my text given rightly for the first time, from the parish registers of St Leonard's, Shoreditch; where they were all three christened in a batch on Sept. 24, 1801. The family were at that date living in Craven Street.

p. 2, note 2. Brown (Houghton MSS.) says simply that Thomas Keats was a 'native of Devon.' His daughter, Mrs Llanos, tells me she remembers hearing as a child that he came from the Land's End. Persons of the name are still living in Plymouth.

p. 5, note 2. The total amount of the funds paid into Court by the executors under Mr Jennings's will (see Preface, p. viii) was £18160. 19s. 5d.

p. 11, note 1, and p. 70, note 1. Of the total last mentioned, there came to the widow first and last (partly by reversion from other legatees who predeceased her) sums amounting to £9843. 2s.

In the Chancery proceedings the precise terms of the deed executed by Mrs Jennings for the benefit of her grandchildren are not quoted, but only its general purport; whence it appears that the sum she made over to Messrs Sandell and Abbey in trust for them amounted approximately to £8000, and included all the reversions fallen or still to fall in as above mentioned. The balance it is to be presumed she retained for her own support (she being then 74).

p. 17, note 1. The following letter written by Mr Abbey to Mr Taylor the publisher, under April 18, 1821, soon after the news of Keats's death reached England, speaks for itself. The letter is from Woodhouse MSS. B.

"Sir,

I beg pardon for not replying to your favor of the 30th ult. respecting the late Mr Jno. Keats.

I am obliged by your note, but he having withdrawn himself from my controul, and acted contrary to my advice, I cannot interfere with his affairs.

I am, Sir,

Yr. mo. Hble St.,

RICHD. ABBEY."

p. 34, note 1. The difficulty of determining the exact date and place of Keats's first introduction to Hunt arises as follows.—Cowden Clarke states plainly and circumstantially that it took place in Leigh Hunt's cottage at Hampstead. Hunt in his *Autobiography* says it was 'in the spring of the year 1816' that he went to live at Hampstead in the cottage in question. Putting these two statements together, we get the result stated as probable in the text. But on the other hand there is the strongly Huntian character of Keats's *Epistle* to G. F. Mathew, dated November 1815, which would seem to indicate an earlier acquaintance (see p. 31). Unluckily Leigh Hunt himself has darkened counsel on the point by a paragraph inserted in the last edition of his *Autobiography*, as follows:—(Pref. no. 7, p. 257) "It was not at Hampstead that I first saw Keats. It was at York Buildings, in the New Road (No. 8), where I wrote part of the *Indicator*, and he resided with me while in Mortimer Street, Kentish Town (No. 13), where I concluded it. I mention this for the curious in such things, among whom I am one." The student must not be misled by this remark of Hunt's, which is evidently only due to a slip of memory. It is quite true that Keats lived with Hunt in Mortimer

Street, Kentish Town, during part of July and August 1820 (see page 197): and that before moving to that address Hunt had lived for more than a year (from the autumn of 1818 to the spring of 1820) at 8, New Road. But that Keats was intimate with him two years and a half earlier, when he was in fact living not in London at all but at the Vale of Health, is abundantly certain.

p. 37, note 1. Cowden Clarke tells how Keats once calling and finding him fallen asleep over Chaucer, wrote on the blank space at the end of the *Floure and the Leafe* the sonnet beginning 'This pleasant tale is like a little copse.' Reynolds on reading it addressed to Keats the following sonnet of his own, which is unpublished (Houghton MSS.), and has a certain biographical interest. It is dated Feb. 27, 1817.

"Thy thoughts, dear Keats, are like fresh-gathered leaves,
 Or white flowers pluck'd from some sweet lily bed;
 They set the heart a-breathing, and they shed
 The glow of meadows, mornings, and spring eves,
 O'er the excited soul.—Thy genius weaves
 Songs that shall make the age be nature-led,
 And win that coronal for thy young head
 Which time's strange [qy. strong?] hand of freshness ne'er
 bereaves.
 Go on! and keep thee to thine own green way,
 Singing in that same key which Chaucer sung;
 Be thou companion of the summer day,
 Roaming the fields and older woods among:—
 So shall thy muse be ever in her May,
 And thy luxuriant spirit ever young."

p. 45, note 1. Woodhouse MSS. A. contains the text of the first draft in question, with some preliminary words of Woodhouse as follows:—

"The lines at p. 36 of Keats's printed poems are altered from a copy of verses written by K. at the request of his brother George, and by the latter sent as a valentine to the lady. The following is a copy of the lines as originally written:—

Hadst thou lived in days of old,
 Oh what wonders had been told
 Of thy lively dimpled face,
 And thy footsteps full of grace:
 Of thy hair's luxurious darkling,
 Of thine eyes' expressive sparkling.

And thy voice's swelling rapture,
 Taking hearts a ready capture.
 Oh! if thou hadst breathed then,
 Thou hadst made the Muses ten.
 Could'st thou wish for lineage higher
 Than twin sister of Thalia?
 At least for ever, ever more
 Will I call the Graces four."

Here follow lines 41—68 of the poem as afterwards published:
 and in conclusion:—

"Ah me! whither shall I flee?
 Thou hast metamorphosed me.
 Do not let me sigh and pine,
 Prythee be my valentine.

14 Feby. 1816."

p. 47, note 1. Mrs Procter's memory, however, betrayed her when she informed Lord Houghton that the colour of Keats's eyes was blue. That they were pure hazel-brown is certain, from the evidence alike of C. C. Clarke, of George Keats and his wife (as transmitted by their daughter Mrs Speed to her son), and from the various portraits painted from life and posthumously by Severn and Hilton. Mrs Procter calls his hair auburn: Mrs Speed had heard from her father and mother that it was 'golden red,' which may mean nearly the same thing: I have seen a lock in the possession of Sir Charles Dilke, and should rather call it a warm brown, likely to have looked gold in the lights. Bailey in Houghton MSS. speaks of it as extraordinarily thick and curly, and says that to lay your hand on his head was like laying it 'on the rich plumage of a bird.' An evidently misleading description of Keats's general aspect is that of Coleridge when he describes him as a 'loose, slack, not well-dressed youth.' The sage must have been drawing from his inward eye; those intimate with Keats being of one accord as to his appearance of trim strength and 'fine compactness of person.' Coleridge's further mention of his hand as shrunken and old-looking seems exact.

p. 78, note 1. The isolated expressions of Keats on this subject, which alone have been hitherto published, have exposed him somewhat unjustly to the charge of petulance and morbid suspicion. Fairness seems to require that the whole passage in which he deals with it should be given. The passage occurs in a

letter to Bailey written from Hampstead and dated Oct. 8, 1817, of which only a fragment was printed by Lord Houghton, and after him by Mr Buxton Forman (*Works*, vol. III. p. 82, no. XVI.).

"I went to Hunt's and Haydon's who live now neighbours.—Shelley was there—I know nothing about anything in this part of the world—every Body seems at Loggerheads. There's Hunt infatuated—there's Haydon's picture in statu quo—There's Hunt walks up and down his painting-room criticizing every head most unmercifully—There's Horace Smith tired of Hunt—'The Web of our life is of mingled yarn.'...I am quite disgusted with literary men, and will never know another except Wordsworth—no not even Byron. Here is an instance of the friendship of such. Haydon and Hunt have known each other many years—now they live, pour ainsi dire, jealous neighbours. Haydon says to me, Keats, don't show your lines to Hunt on any account, or he will have done half for you—so it appears Hunt wishes it to be thought. When he met Reynolds in the Theatre, John told him I was getting on to the completion of 4000 lines—Ah! says Hunt, had it not been for me they would have been 7000! If he will say this to Reynolds, what would he to other people? Haydon received a Letter a little while back on the subject from some Lady, which contains a caution to me, thro' him, on this subject. Now is not all this a most pauntry thing to think about?"

p. 83, note 1. See Haydon, *Autobiography*, vol. I. pp. 384-5. The letter containing Keats's account of the same entertainment was printed for the first time by Speed, *Works*, vol. I. p. i. no. 1, where it is dated merely 'Featherstone Buildings, Monday.' (At Featherstone Buildings lived the family of Charles Wells.) In Houghton MSS. I find a transcript of the same letter in the hand of Mr Coventry Patmore, with a note in Lord Houghton's hand: "These letters I did not print. R. M. M." In the transcript is added in a parenthesis after the weekday the date 5 April, 1818: but this is a mistake; the 5th of April in that year was not a Monday: and the contents of Keats's letter itself, as well as a comparison with Haydon's words in his *Autobiography*, prove beyond question that it was written on Monday, the 5th of January.

p. 87, note 1. Similar expressions about the Devonshire weather occur in nearly all Keats's letters written thence in the course of March and April. The letter to Bailey containing the sentences quoted in my text is wrongly printed both by Lord

Houghton and Mr Forman under date Sept. 1818. I find the same date given between brackets at the head of the same letter as transcribed in Woodhouse MSS. B., proving that an error was early made either in docketing or copying it. The contents of the letter leave no doubt as to its real date. The sentences quoted prove it to have been written not in autumn but in spring. It contains Keats's reasons both for going down to join his brother Tom at Teignmouth, and for failing to visit Bailey at Oxford on the way: now in September Keats was not at Teignmouth at all, and Bailey had left Oxford for good, and was living at his curacy in Cumberland (see p. 122). Moreover there is an allusion by Keats himself to this letter in another which he wrote the next day to Reynolds, whereby its true date can be fixed with precision as Friday, March 13.

p. 112, note 1. The following unpublished letter of Keats to Mr Taylor (from Woodhouse MSS. B.) has a certain interest, both in itself and as fixing the date of his departure for the North :—

“My dear Taylor,

“Sunday evening,

I am sorry I have not had time to call and wish you health till my return. Really I have been hard run these last three days. However, au revoir, God keep us all well! I start tomorrow Morning. My brother Tom will I am afraid be lonely. I can scarcely ask the loan of books for him, since I still keep those you lent me a year ago. If I am overweening, you will I know be indulgent. Therefore when you shall write, do send him some you think will be most amusing—he will be careful in returning them. Let him have one of my books bound. I am ashamed to catalogue these messages. There is but one more, which ought to go for nothing as there is a lady concerned. I promised Mrs Reynolds one of my books bound. As I cannot write in it let the opposite” [a leaf with the name and ‘from the author,’ notes Woodhouse] “be pasted in ‘prythee. Remember me to Percy St.—Tell Hilton that one gratification on my return will be to find him engaged on a history piece to his own content. And tell Dewint I shall become a disputant on the landscape. Bow for me very genteely to Mrs D. or she will not admit your diploma. Remember me to Hessey, saying I hope he’ll *Carey* his point. I would not forget Woodhouse. Adieu!

Your sincere friend,

JOHN O’GAORS.

June 22, 1818. Hampstead” [The date and place are added by Woodhouse in red ink, presumably from the post-mark].

p. 120, note 1. In the concluding lines quoted in my text, Mr Buxton Forman has noticed the failure of rhyme between 'All the magic of the place' and the next line, 'So saying, with a spirit's glance,' and has proposed, by way of improvement, to read 'with a spirit's grace'. I find the true explanation in Woodhouse MSS. A., where the poem is continued thus in pencil after the word 'place'.

"'Tis now free to stupid face,
To cutters, and to fashion boats,
To cravats and to petticoats:—
The great sea shall war it down,
For its fame shall not be blown
At each farthing Quadrille dance.
So saying with a spirit's glance
He dived"—.

Evidently Keats was dissatisfied with the first six of these lines (as he well might be), and suppressed them in copying the piece both for his correspondents and for the press: forgetting at the same time to give any indication of the hiatus so caused.

p. 128, note 1. Lord Houghton says, "On returning to the south, Keats found his brother alarmingly ill, and immediately joined him at Teignmouth." It is certain that no such second visit to Teignmouth was made by either brother. The error is doubtless due to the misdating of Keats's March letter to Bailey: see last note but two, p. 225.

p. 138, note 1. Keats in this letter proves how imperfect was his knowledge of his own affairs, and how much those affairs had been mismanaged. At the time when he thus found himself near the end of the capital on which he had hitherto subsisted, there was another resource at his disposal of which it is evident he knew nothing. Quite apart from the provision made by Mrs Jennings for her grandchildren after her husband's death, and administered by Mr Abbey, there were the legacies Mr Jennings himself had left them by will; one of £1000 direct; the other, of a capital to yield £50 a year, in reversion after their mother's death (see p. 5). The former sum was invested by order of the Court in Consols, and brought £1550. 7s. 10d. worth of that security at the price at which it then stood. £1666. 13s. 4d. worth of the same stock was farther purchased from the funds of the estate in order to yield the income of £50 a year. The interest on both these investments was duly paid to Frances Rawlings

during her life: but after her death in 1810 both investments lay untouched and accumulating interest until 1823; when George Keats, to whose knowledge their existence seems then to have been brought for the first time, received on application to the Court a fourth share of each, with its accumulations. Two years afterwards Fanny Keats received in like manner on application the remaining three shares (those of her brothers John and Tom as well as her own), the total amount paid to her being £3875. 5s. 7d., and to George £1147. 5s. 1d. It was a part of the ill luck which attended the poet always that the very existence of these funds must have been ignored or forgotten by his guardian and solicitors at the time when he most needed them.

p. 148, note 1. Landon's letter to Lord Houghton on receipt of a presentation copy of the *Life and Letters*, in 1848, begins characteristically as follows:—

“Bath, Aug. 29.

Dear Milnes,

On my return to Bath last evening, after six weeks' absence, I find your valuable present of Keatses Works. He better deserves such an editor than I such a mark of your kindness. Of all our poets, excepting Shakspeare and Milton, and perhaps Chaucer, he has most of the poetical character—fire, fancy, and diversity. He has not indeed overcome so great a difficulty as Shelley in his *Cenci*, nor united so many powers of the mind as Southey in *Kehama*—but there is an effluence of power and light pervading all his works, and a freshness such as we feel in the glorious dawn of Chaucer.—”

p. 152, note 1. I think there is no doubt that *Hyperion* was begun by Keats beside his brother's sickbed in September or October 1818, and that it is to it he alludes when he speaks in those days of ‘plunging into abstract images,’ and finding a ‘feverous relief’ in the ‘abstractions’ of poetry. Certainly these phrases could hardly apply to so slight a task as the translation of Ronsard's sonnet, *Nature ornant Cassandre*, which is the only specific piece of work he about the same time mentions. Brown says distinctly, of the weeks when Keats was first living with him after Tom's death in December—“It was then he wrote *Hyperion*”; but these words rather favour than exclude the supposition that it had been already begun. In his December-January letter to America Keats himself alludes to the poem by name, and says he has been ‘going on a little’ with it: and on the 14th of February, 1819, says ‘I have not gone on with *Hyperion*.’ During the next

three months he was chiefly occupied on the *Odes*, and whether he at the same time wrote any more of *Hyperion* we cannot tell. It was certainly finished, all but the revision, by some time in April, as in that month Woodhouse had the MS. to read, and notes (see Buxton Forman, *Works*, vol. II. p. 143) that "it contains 2 books and $\frac{1}{4}$ —(about 900 lines in all):" the actual length of the piece as published being 883 lines and a word, and that of the draft copied by Woodhouse before revision 891 and a word (see below, note to p. 164). When Keats, after nearly a year's interruption of his correspondence with Bailey, tells him in a letter from Winchester in August or September, "I have also been writing parts of my *Hyperion*," this must not be taken as meaning that he has been writing them lately, but only that he has been writing them,—like *Isabella* and the *Eve of St Agnes*, which he mentions at the same time,—since the date of his last letter.

p. 164, note 1. The version of *The Eve of St Agnes* given in Woodhouse MSS. A. is copied almost without change from the corrected state of the original MS. in the possession of Mr F. Locker-Lampson; which is in all probability that actually written by Keats at Chichester (see p. 133). The readings of the ms. in question are given with great care by Mr Buxton Forman (*Works*, vol. II. p. 71 foll.), but the first seven stanzas of the poem as printed are wanting in it. Students may therefore be glad to have, from Woodhouse's transcript, the following table of the changes in those stanzas made by the poet in the course of composition :—

Stanza I.: line 1, for "chill" stood "cold": line 4, for "was" stood "were": line 7, for "from" stood "in": line 9 (and Stanza II., line 1), for "prayer" stood "prayers". Stanza III.: line 7, for "went" stood "turn'd": line 8, for "Rough" stood "Black". After stanza III. stood the following stanza, suppressed in the poem as printed.

4.

But there are ears may hear sweet melodies,
And there are eyes to brighten festivals,
And there are feet for nimble minstrelsiads,
And many a lip that for the red wine calls—
Follow, then follow to the illumined halls,
Follow me youth—and leave the eremite—
Give him a tear—then trophied bannerals
And many a brilliant tasseling of light
Shall droop from arched ways this high baronial night.

Stanza v. : line 1, for "revelry" stood "revellers": lines 3—5, for—

"Numerous as shadows haunting fairily
The brain new-stuff'd in youth with triumphs gay
Of old romance. These let us wish away,"—

stood the following:—

"Ah what are they? the idle pulse scarce stirs,
The muse should never make the spirit gay;
Away, bright dullness, laughing fools away."

p. 166, note 1. At what precise date *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* was written is uncertain. As of the *Ode to Melancholy*, Keats makes no mention of this poem in his correspondence. In Woodhouse MSS. A. it is dated 1819. That Woodhouse made his transcripts before or while Keats was on his Shanklin-Winchester expedition in that year, is I think certain both from the readings of the transcripts themselves, and from the absence among them of *Lamia* and the *Ode to Autumn*. Hence it is to the first half of 1819 that *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* must belong, like so much of the poet's best work besides. The line quoted in my text shows that the theme was already in his mind when he composed the *Eve of St Agnes* in January. Mr Buxton Forman is certainly mistaken in supposing it to have been written a year later, after his critical attack of illness (*Works*, vol. II. p. 357, note).

p. 186, note 1. The relation of *Hyperion, A Vision*, to the original *Hyperion* is a vital point in the history of Keats's mind and art, and one that has been generally misunderstood. The growth of the error is somewhat interesting to trace. The first mention of the *Vision* is in Lord Houghton's *Life and Letters*, ed. 1848, Vol. I. p. 244. Having then doubtless freshly in his mind the passage of Brown's MS. memoir quoted in the text, Lord Houghton stated the matter rightly in the words following his account of *Hyperion*:—"He afterwards published it as a fragment, and still later re-cast it into the shape of a *Vision*, which remains equally unfinished." When eight years later the same editor printed the piece for the first time (in *Miscellanies of the Philobiblon Society*, Vol. III. 1856—7) from the MS. given him by Brown, he must have forgotten Brown's account of its origin, and writes doubtfully: "Is it the original sketch out of which the earlier part of the poem was composed, or is it the commencement of a reconstruction of the whole? I have no external evidence to decide this question:" and further,—“the problem of the priority

of the two poems—both fragments, and both so beautiful—may afford a wide field for ingenious and critical conjecture." Ten years later again, when he brought out the second edition of the *Life and Letters*, Lord Houghton had drifted definitely into a wrong conclusion on the point, and printing the piece in his Appendix as 'Another Version,' says in his text (p. 206) "on reconsideration, I have no doubt that it was the first draft." Accordingly it is given as 'an earlier version' in Mr W. M. Rossetti's edition of 1872, as 'the first version' in Lord Houghton's own edition of 1876; and so on, positively but quite wrongly, in the several editions by Messrs Buxton Forman, Speed, and W. T. Arnold. The obvious superiority of *Hyperion* to the *Vision* no doubt at first sight suggested the conclusion to which these editors, following Lord Houghton, had come. In the mean time at least two good critics, Mr W. B. Scott and Mr. R. Garnett, had always held on internal evidence that the *Vision* was not a first draft, but a recast attempted by the poet in the decline of his powers: an opinion in which Mr Garnett was confirmed by his recollection of a statement to that effect in the lost MS. of Woodhouse (see above, Preface, p. v, and W. T. Arnold, *Works* &c. p. xlix, note). Brown's words, quoted in my text, leave no doubt whatever that these gentlemen were right. They are confirmed from another side by Woodhouse MSS. A, which contains the copy of a real early draft of *Hyperion*. In this copy the omissions and alterations made in revising the piece are all marked in pencil, and are as follows, (taking the number of lines in the several books of the poem as printed).

Book I. After line 21 stood the cancelled lines—

"Thus the old Eagle, drowsy with great grief,
Sat moulting his weak plumage, never more
To be restored or soar against the sun;
While his three sons upon Olympus stood."

In line 30, for "stay'd Ixion's wheel" stood "eased Ixion's toil". In line 48, for "tone" stood "tune". In line 76, for "gradual" stood "sudden". In line 102, after the word "Saturn," stood the cancelled words—

"What dost think?

Am I that same? O Chaos!"

In line 156, for "yielded like the mist" stood "gave to them like mist." In line 189, for "Savour of poisonous brass" stood "A poison-foel of brass." In line 200 for "When earthquakes jar

their battlements and towers" stood "When an earthquake hath shook their city towers." After line 205 stood the cancelled line "Most like a rose-bud to a fairy's lute." In line 209, for "And like a rose" stood "Yes, like a rose." In line 268, for "Suddenly" stood "And, sudden."

BOOK II. In line 128, for "vibrating" stood "vibrated." In line 134 for "starry Uranus" stood "starr'd Uranus" (some friend doubtless called Keats's attention to the false quantity).

BOOK III. After line 125 stood the cancelled lines:—

"Into a hue more roseate than sweet pain
Gives to a ravish'd nymph, when her warm tears
Gush luscious with no sob; or more severe."

In line 126, for "most like" stood "more like."

In these omissions and corrections, two things will be apparent to the student: first, that they are all greatly for the better; and second, that where a corrected passage occurs again in the *Vision*, it in every case corresponds to the printed *Hyperion*, and not to the draft of the poem preserved by Woodhouse. This of itself would make it certain that the *Vision* was not a first version of *Hyperion*, but a recast of the poem as revised (in all probability at Winchester) after its first composition. Taken together with the statement of Brown, which is perfectly explicit as to time, place, and circumstances, and the corresponding statement of Woodhouse as recollected by Mr Garnett, the proof is from all sides absolute: and the 'first version' theory must disappear henceforward from editions of and commentaries on our poet.

p. 193, note 2. A more explicit refutation of Haydon's account was given, some years after its appearance, by Cowden Clarke (see Preface, no. 10), not, indeed, from personal observation at the time in question, but from general knowledge of the poet's character:—

"I can scarcely conceive of anything more unjust than the account which that ill-ordered being, Haydon, the artist, left behind him in his 'Diary' respecting the idolised object of his former intimacy, John Keats" . . . "Haydon's detraction was the more odious because its object could not contradict the charge, and because it supplied his old critical antagonists (if any remained) with an authority for their charge against him of Cockney ostentation and display. The most mean-spirited and trumpety twaddle in the paragraph was, that Keats was so far gone in sensual excitement as to put cayenne pepper on his

tongue when taking his claret. In the first place, if the stupid trick were ever played, I have not the slightest belief in its serious sincerity. During my knowledge of him Keats never purchased a bottle of claret; and from such observation as could not escape me, I am bound to say that his domestic expenses never would have occasioned him a regret or a self-reproof; and, lastly, I never perceived in him even a tendency to imprudent indulgence."

p. 198, note 1. In Medwin's *Life of Shelley* (1847), pp. 89-92, are some notices of Keats communicated to the writer by Fanny Brawne (then Mrs Lindon), to whom Medwin alludes as his 'kind correspondent.' Medwin's carelessness of statement and workmanship is well known: he is perfectly casual in the use of quotation marks and the like: but I think an attentive reading of the paragraph, beginning on p. 91, which discusses Mr Finch's account of Keats's death, leaves no doubt that it continues in substance the quotation previously begun from Mrs Lindon. "That his sensibility," so runs the text, "was most acute, is true, and his passions were very strong, but not violent; if by that term, violence of temper is implied. His was no doubt susceptible, but his anger seemed rather to turn on himself than others, and in moments of greatest irritation, it was only by a sort of savage despondency that he sometimes grieved and wounded his friends. Violence such as the letter" [of Mr Finch] "describes, was quite foreign to his nature. For more than a twelvemonth before quitting England, I saw him every day", [this would be true of Fanny Brawne from Oct. 1819 to Sept. 1820, if we except the Kentish Town period in the summer, and is certainly more nearly true of her than of anyone else,] "I often witnessed his sufferings, both mental and bodily, and I do not hesitate to say, that he never could have addressed an unkind expression, much less a violent one, to any human being." The above passage has been overlooked by critics of Keats, and I am glad to bring it forward, as serving to show a truer and kinder appreciation of the poet by the woman he loved than might be gathered from her phrase in the letter to Dilke so often quoted.

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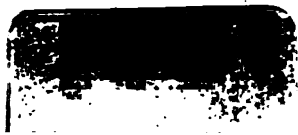
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